

WILLIAM J. CUNNINGHAM

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: March 17, 1997

Copyright 2000 ADST

Q: Today is the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day, 1997. This is an interview with William J. Cunningham. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. We are doing this on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. To begin with, can you tell me when and where you were born?

CUNNINGHAM: I was born in Santa Monica, California on January 21, 1926.

Q: Could you tell me a bit about your parents, about their background?

CUNNINGHAM: My mother's side of the family is of German heritage. My great grandfather and great grandmother migrated from Germany to Iowa in the 1850s. I'm doing a little bit of family research on them and in fact I found their golden wedding anniversary photograph. My grandfather's name was George and he moved to California from Minneapolis in 1912 for reasons of health, his and some of the other family members. My mother, who had been born in Minneapolis in 1899, spent the rest of her life in California. She was educated at a private high school, Ramona Convent, operated by the Sisters of the Holy Name in Alhambra, California.

My father's side of the family is of Irish background. My great grandparents on that side also immigrated in the middle of the 19th century to Massachusetts. My grandfather Cunningham was trained as a boot maker. As a young man he went to California toward the end of the 19th century. He at first applied his trade knowledge as a boot maker in San Francisco, which was the big city in California in those days. Later he settled in Los Angeles and became a very successful mortician, or undertaker as they were called then. He had ten children, one of whom died young. My father was the second oldest. He was a medical doctor. He was probably the most highly educated member of that generation in his family. He completed his medical degree at St. Louis University in 1922 and began his practice in Los Angeles.



He had known my mother since high school days. They were introduced by his sister, my aunt, Kathleen. They were married in June of 1924 and lived in Santa Monica until 1927. According to my mother, my father's practice was not prospering there because there was a lot of competition. My grandfather owned land in the Antelope Valley, which is on the high deserts of California about 80 miles to the northwest of Los Angeles. My mother encouraged my father to go out there and she persuaded my grandfather to develop the land and have my father manage it for alfalfa production, so that is what happened. In 1927 they moved out there and began cultivating about 40 acres of alfalfa seven miles east of Lancaster, California. I was a year-and-a-half when we moved out there. I don't remember Santa Monica at all. My earliest memories are of the ranch, as we called it, in the Antelope Valley.

My father resumed his medical practice there and he became very successful. He was a general practitioner, a typical country doctor, who made house calls as far as 40 miles away delivering children in the middle of the night; taking care of youngsters who came down with mumps, measles, chickenpox, and all the rest; taking care of hunters who got themselves wounded while hunting jackrabbits in the valley on the weekends; taking care of people who were injured on farm machinery; all those sorts of things that you do in that kind of community.

That's where I grew up. I have a younger brother who happens now to live in Houston, Texas. He was for thirty years the performing arts critic of the now defunct Houston Post. He now is a program annotator and writes for several arts publications. It so happens that he has a review of the latest Houston Grand Opera production "Jackie O." in this morning's Washington Post. I also have a sister who is the middle one of the three of us. She lives also in Lancaster. There was a fourth child, a sister, between my sister and me. There was something defective and she died within a few days, hours, after birth in 1927 or 1928. My father died in 1961. My mother is still living. She is 97 and now in a convalescent hospital in California.

Q: Where did you go to school?

CUNNINGHAM: I did my first two years at St. John's Military Academy, a military boarding school in Los Angeles, California, operated by the Sisters of Mercy. My parents were both from a strong Catholic family and they wanted all their children to have a Catholic education. Unfortunately the depression came along, and I had series illnesses in the second grade, so it was not possible to continue my education at a private school that must have been costly for my parents, then with a young family and married only eight years. I went back to Antelope Valley and continued my education at Roosevelt Elementary School, now called East Side Elementary, through the eighth grade. From there I went to the Antelope Valley Joint Union High School, as it was known in those days, in Lancaster. It is now Antelope Valley High School. It was called Joint Union because the school district covered parts of two counties, northern Los Angeles County and southern Kern County. I completed my high school education in January of 1944 and immediately went into the Navy V-12.



Q: Of course World War II was in full swing.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right and the D-Day landing had not occurred yet. American troops in the Pacific were still way down in the South Pacific. Guadalcanal had taken place a couple of years earlier. I'm not sure if they had gotten to Tarawa by '44 or not. Anyway, it looked like the long haul still at that point and I went into the Navy V-12 program. My mother had noticed the announcement of the V-12 program the previous year and had encouraged me to take the entrance examination, which I took in the fall of 1943 at our high school. I was selected and went in for a physical exam at the Navy Recruiting Station in Los Angeles on December of 1943. I was sworn into the Navy there on the 8th of December 1943.

Q: The V-12 program being what?

CUNNINGHAM: The V-12 program was the accelerated wartime naval officer-training program. It operated at maybe 100 colleges and universities around the country. It lasted four academic semesters and they were all accelerated. You took three semesters of course work in a calendar year, and at the end of the fourth semester you were sent to what was called deck school at one of a dozen locations in the U.S., mostly major universities like Columbia or Cal/Berkeley. After 18 weeks of training at a deck school you were commissioned an ensign in the U.S. navy, and sent to sea. There were 120,000 who went into that program. I believe 46,000 were commissioned as Marine second lieutenants or as U.S. naval reserve ensigns.

I was assigned to a V-12 unit at Washburn Municipal University in Topeka, Kansas. During my second semester at Washburn I learned of an examination for the U.S. Navy's ROTC program, which was also operated at colleges and universities around the country, but at fewer of them. At that time I was told there were only 13 Navy ROTC units. I have since seen figures indicating that the number was larger, perhaps 30 or so. In any case, I passed that examination and was then transferred to the U.S. Navy ROTC unit at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. I went there in October of 1944 and did five semesters there. I was attracted to that program for two reasons. First of all there was more course work, more college work in it, seven semesters, until commissioning. Second, the pay was a little better. As an apprentice seaman in the Navy V-12 program we were paid \$21 a month out of which we paid laundry, insurance premiums, and bought savings bonds.

Q: And hair cuts, too.



CUNNINGHAM: That's right, and other necessities. The midshipmen's pay (nicer uniform also) was \$50 a month so that was a big raise. Also upon commissioning in the navy ROTC program you immediately went to sea. When you finished your course work you went to sea, and that was attractive to me. I was there and was commissioned in June of 1946. By that time the war was over. It was at the University of New Mexico that my interest in the Foreign Service first was stimulated. In any case in June of '46 we were given the option to take our commissions and go into active reserve, but not on duty, or to take a year of sea duty and then go into the active reserves. I elected to go to sea because I felt first of all that I owed the country some service for the education that I had received at taxpayer's expense, and secondly I wanted to apply what I had been studying.

The Foreign Service story really begins in New Mexico. I think it was the first semester that I was at New Mexico during the winter of 1944-45 that I took a course in international relations, or something like that. The NROTC program was very highly structured, as was the V-12 program. It allowed only a few electives. Out of 132 credits I think we were allowed something like 40 for elective courses and I put a lot of that into Spanish, and then the rest into what were called Government and Public Administration. A man named Victor Kleven who had attended Oxford taught this course in international relations. He was not a Rhodes scholar but he allowed us to think that he was a Rhodes scholar until asked directly about it. He had been at Oxford the year after Anthony Eden went through there, and he was in the same class year as Lord Carrington, I believe.

Q: A former foreign minister, I think.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, and I think permanent representative at the UN.

Q: I think so. I'm not even sure that he was a foreign minister.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. He was very prominent in foreign affairs. In any case, Kleven was on a first name basis with Carrington. Kleven was the ultimate Oxonian. He never came to class in anything other than a three-piece suit. He always carried his handkerchief tucked into his right hand sleeve. He wore a Homburg around campus. He had a very Continental air. He was a very nice man. I took a number of courses under him.



In this initial course in international relations that I took with him he gave a lecture on diplomacy one day. I remember going up to him after class and saying, "Professor, that was a very interesting lecture. How does one get into that kind of work?" By then D-Day had taken place but the war was still going on and any career in diplomacy was obviously going to be a long time afterwards. I don't remember for sure what Kleven told me but whatever it was it somehow led to the notion that I should go to the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. That may have been what he said, but I don't know now for sure. I kept the conversation in mind and began to set my cap for Georgetown at some time in the future.

Q: Tell me about your duty in the active Navy.

CUNNINGHAM: I was assigned in July of 1946 to the USS Incessant, AM-248, a steel hulled seagoing minesweeper. It was built on what was called a PCE hull, or patrol craft or escort. I reported to the ship at Terminal Island, California in July of 1946.

Q: This was in San Francisco?

CUNNINGHAM: No, it was in Long Beach Harbor adjacent to the Port of Long Beach. I reported to the ship and I was told that we were to take the ship to Shanghai and turn her over to the Chinese navy under the assistance program the U.S. had with the Nationalist Government of China at that time. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists was in suspense at that time. General Marshall was in the midst of his ultimately futile effort to mediate the conflict between them and to persuade them to form a coalition government. This ship had been captained on most of its previous voyages by a man who was described to me as an eccentric individual and who was no longer the commanding officer at the time I reported aboard. Just before relinquishing command of the Incessant he ordered the shipyard to remove all of the sweep gear, and all of the armament from this ship. When I boarded this ship it was essentially a nice yacht. It had no functional purpose whatsoever. We couldn't lay mines. We couldn't sweep mines. We couldn't shoot at anybody except with a couple of Garand rifles and side arms that we had on board.

Anyhow, I went on board this ship and we were to set sail a couple of weeks later for Hawaii with a crew of four officers and one third the number of ratings that was authorized for that kind of vessel. We had one quartermaster, one storekeeper, one engineer, etc., etc., all down the line. Off we went with a flotilla of three other vessels, the same class, the same type, except they were equipped for minesweeping. It took us two weeks to get to Pearl Harbor. We went through a terrible storm outside of the port of San Pedro in the California channel there. I was never so sick in my life. I had to stand watch and I was absolutely delirious. Somehow after a couple of days things calmed down, and I did too, and the rest of the trip went off all right.



I don't think people nowadays realize what bad shape the U.S. armed forces were in at that time. The shortage of qualified personnel in all ratings on our ship was just one example. An Essex class aircraft carrier was berthed just opposite the Incessant in Terminal Island. That carrier had a rust spot that went from water line to the top of the conning tower and spread over nearly the entire side of the ship. It was less than a year after Japan's surrender and the end of hostilities, but our ships could barely get underway and the U.S. did not have a single combat-ready division. The speed of demobilization had a disastrous effect on our combat readiness.

It took the Incessant two weeks to get to Hawaii. I think I was the first guy on the ship to sight land on that cruise. We went into Pearl Harbor and we were told that we were to sail for Shanghai in three days. I was the supply officer and before the last mooring line was made fast to the wharf I hit the dock running to find a warehouse from which to restock the ship. We were there a month, as it turned out, and at the end of that time we were told that we were not going to Shanghai though the other ship three ships in the group were. We were being sent to Bremerton, Washington to decommission the ship.

We left for Bremerton I guess some time in August or September in the company of two other ships. On the way up there one of the other ships - - the Pirate - - lost main power completely. They had a complete engine breakdown. We were three or four days out of Bremerton at that point on the high seas. Since the Incessant had a clear after deck, thanks to the removal in Terminal Island of all sweep gear and armaments, we were designated to take the Pirate under tow on the high seas. Thank God it was a calm day. We had to get a thousand foot steel hawser across to the Pirate, which we did, although our crew of mainly first and second class seamen had no training for this sort of operation or experience with it. We started the operation about noon and just before sundown everything was secured. We made our way safely into Bremerton where we did decommission the ship in November of 1946. It took them a month or so to decommission the ship.

Finally toward the end of November, about Thanksgiving, I got orders to report to Tiburon, California to the Harbor Defense School where I went to learn how to manufacture anti-torpedo and anti-submarine nets and how to put them down. That training period lasted about three months. Again, there was a long hiatus from the end of the training period until onward assignment. It was very boring hanging around the BOQ and the officers club there. It was not far from San Francisco but we were not able to see it and it took a long time to get in there by bus, the only means of transportation available to us.



I was finally assigned to the USS Cohoes, AN-78, a seagoing net tender. Two officers only were assigned to these ships, so I was the Executive Officer, barely 21 years of age. The skipper of the Cohoes, whose name I don't recall, was Lieutenant, and old salt who had come up through the enlisted ranks. He was a very colorful man, full of stories about at least one trip he had made to Antarctica on a expedition aboard a wooden hulled ship called the Bear. When I reported aboard the Cohoes was sent to sea, though not to put down anti-torpedo nets or anything of that nature. One of our jobs was to remove mooring buoys at various harbors and coves along the California coast where landing craft had been moored during amphibious training exercises conducted during the war. We would tow a barge down and spend a day hauling these things out of the sea. They all smelled to high heaven and we would put them on the barge and try to locate it so it was downwind of the ship.

The other thing we did was to go up to Drakes Bay, which is north of San Francisco. Liberty ships were being brought back to the U.S. from the Pacific at that time in tandem, one ship towing another that had no main power. Our job was to disconnect the tow from the towing ship. The ships without main power couldn't be towed into San Francisco Bay because of this 1000 foot steel cable used for towing would drag along the bottom of the Bay and cut all the cables connecting San Francisco to other communities around the Bay, so these tow had to go up to Drakes Bay (so named because this is where Sir Frances Drake landed in about 1579 during his round the world voyage) and be separated there. Nobody on the other side of the Pacific thought about this problem or how these ships were going to be detached from one another. We were ordered to go alongside of the tow, up under its bow, grab the steel hawser, good United States Government property, secure it to our ship, and cut this one inch high grade steel cable with an acetylene torch in order, thus releasing the tow, which then would be steered by tugs into San Francisco Bay. The hawser, minus the portion we cut off, would somehow or another be retrieved by the towing ship. This procedure violated one of the cardinal lessons in my seamanship courses: never willfully destroy a standard issue steel cable, which usually are manufactured with connectors at each end so that they can be shackled to a pad eye on ship or shore. Indeed, we were taught to do all possible to protect these cables from wear and corrosion.

We made several of those expeditions to Drakes Bay. In one of the I think the second - the tugboat pilot who was steering the tow got us lined up wrong with respect to the sea and wind. The Cohoes and took a roll against the bow of the ship, and half of the bridge on our ship was demolished. No one was injured, but we kept slamming against the side of the Liberty ship and taking more damage. I was on the deck with the crew, which was working feverishly to release the lines that moored us to the Liberty. My language on that occasion included vocabulary inappropriate to my subsequent diplomatic career.



We took the Cohoes back to San Francisco Naval Shipyard, got her repaired, went back to Tiburon, our home port, and made a few more expeditions. I learned to maneuver the ship pretty well and was proud of that. I did a four point landing one afternoon bringing it in alongside the dock. I wasn't able to duplicate that the next time. I was released from active duty in June of 1946.

Q: Then what?

CUNNINGHAM: By then I had been admitted to Georgetown School of Foreign Service.

Q: Had you received a regular degree already or not?

CUNNINGHAM: No. That was the problem with the navy ROTC program. I had 132 credits when I left the University of New Mexico, but I did not have a bachelor's degree. The curriculum for the deck officer program, in which I was enrolled, was so designed that requirements for a Bachelor's degree could not be met through any combination of elective with required courses. If I had majored in one of the three engineering programs (mechanical, electrical, or civil) I would have been able to meet the requirements for a B.S. degree at the end of seven semesters, but I didn't want to be an engineer; it didn't interest me. I was in the general program, the arts and sciences program you might say. The required curriculum was heavy on engineering, science, and math. I had four semesters of mathematics through to higher calculus, and of course naval science subjects, so that chewed up a lot of the curriculum and didn't leave enough time for the other course work to earn a degree.

I went to Georgetown. I bought a car and drove across country. I got to Washington D.C. on the first of July, early in the morning. I drove across the 14th Street Bridge just at dawn and I'll never forget the thrill of that moment coming across the bridge. The woods of Virginia came right down to the shore of the Potomac in those days, so when you came on the old Fourteenth Street bridge suddenly the whole landscape, the whole profile, of Washington opened out for you with the Jefferson Memorial on the left, Haines Point on the right, the Capitol over there, and the Washington Monument. It was just a tremendous thrill to be there and to see in reality all of the things that I had been interested in, studied about, learned about in school, and so on.

I went up to Georgetown and found directions to a place called Randall House at 21st and N Street, Northwest. It was a rooming house that was full of university students and civil servants, all lower ranking GS fours, fives, sevens, whatever, young people like myself. There were four to six people to a room, \$35 a month, no meals, just a place to sleep. It was run by an old army master sergeant.



I went up to Georgetown to register and that was where the first disappointment came along because the curriculum that I had followed in my navy training did not correspond very closely to the curriculum of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. Something like 40 of my 132 credits were applicable to Georgetown's requirements for a Bachelor's degree from the School of Foreign Service. That meant that I would have had to spend somewhere on the order of another six semesters earning a bachelors degree. My GI bill would not cover all of that. That was very discouraging for me. I also had a run-in with one of the professors out there, a logic professor, and he cut my grade a full grade point because of our disagreement, which did not have anything do to with what I accomplished in the course, and that was very discouraging. I did take Russian 101 and 102 - - the "in" language in those days. The class met for two and one half hours five nights a week in the old Howard Johnson building on 37th Streeso called because Howard Johnson had donated it - - on the condition that one of the cupolas that decorated all his restaurants would be placed on the roof. The building had no air conditioning or electric fans of any kind. On some July and August evenings the heat was stifling. But we accepted that as normal. The professor was a Dr. Zouvsky, at that time on the staff of the Library of Congress. A graduate assistant, a first generation American of Russian ancestry from Pennsylvania, conducted the class four nights each week. Zouvsky did so on Friday evenings, and he led us in signing Russian folk songs. It was good vocabulary and pronunciation practice, so I think Zouvsky had a good idea about this aspect of language learning. He worked very hard at directing the class, which had a large enrollmen25 or 30, as I recall. By the end of the evening, his shirt would be soaked through with perspiration and his handlebar mustache drooped from the exertion of conducting his choral instruction.

But I was restless, and discouraged at Georgetown, and I just didn't quite see how my studies would lead to my getting into the Foreign Service, given the long curriculum I would have t follow. It's a funny thing but I don't think that I met anybody who was in the Foreign Service at that time. I don't think I had met anybody in Washington who was in the Department of State. I'm not even sure that I went down to the Department of State to see it at that time. Maybe I did, but I don't recall that. No, I probably did not. I don't remember talking with anybody in Georgetown on the faculty about the Department of State at all, or talking to anybody who was a candidate. There was one guy, Richard Vine, now a retired Foreign Service officer, who lived at Randall House in those days. He was a senior at Georgetown as I recall. He ran the telephone switchboard in Randall House. I've seen Dick Vine a few times since. He was, I think, about the only person who was aiming for the Foreign Service with whom I had any contact at that time. He is the only one that I can recall.



Anyway, at the end of the summer I was very discouraged and I called up Howard Matheny, the Dean of Men at the University of New Mexico. Matheny had been one of the officers in the Navy unit when I was there a couple of years previously, and I said I would like to come back. I described my situation to him. He said, "Well Cunningham, you are late for registration. Classes are beginning in a day or two, but anyway get out here as fast as you can and I'll see what I can do for you." I sold my car, used the proceeds to buy a plane ticket, and flew out to Albuquerque. I completed the course work that was necessary for a bachelor's degree in that semester. And then what? I didn't know what I was going to do. I had sort of forgotten about diplomatic service at that point, but I did think I wanted to be in government service.

My transfer back to the University of New Mexico greatly disappointed my parents. They had helped me gain admission to Georgetown, and they were hopeful and proud of my enrollment there. As strong and faithful Catholics, they wanted all of their children to have the advantage of a Catholic university education. My sister and brother later did graduate from Catholic institutions of higher learning. I am the one who missed out. But they were loving parents, and they reconciled themselves to my decision, and I think my father may have understood better than my mother. The first medical school in which he enrolled (the University of Southern California) lost its accreditation during his second year there. He had to repeat that year as a condition of acceptance by another medical school (St. Louis University).

As I neared the end of my last undergraduate semester at New Mexico, I did not know what I would do afterwards. I had no goal. I was walking down the corridor in the Administration Building one day, this was December of 1947 by this time, and the Dean of General Studies, who also had been an officer in the naval unit previously, Dr. Harold Reid, came out of his office. He saw me walking down the corridor and he said, "Cunningham, come into my office. I want to talk to you." I went in and he said, "What are you planning to do? Are you graduating soon?" I said, "Yes, at the end of January." "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know. I don't have any idea." He said, "Why don't you go for a masters degree?" I was stunned. I did not consider myself graduate student material.

Q: One has to point out that in this era, which we both belong to, masters degrees weren't as prevalent by any means. This was something really extra. Basically you got your bachelors degree and out you went.



CUNNINGHAM: Yes, that is right, and the master's degree candidates whom I knew on campus were very highly regarded people. They walked around as sort of exalted authorities. Reed said, "I'll tell you what. If you do it I will see to it that you get a fellowship." At that time it was something like \$100 a month, which would be in addition to the monthly stipend I received under the GI bill. I had enough remaining tuition eligibility under the GI bill to complete a master's degree. I said to him, "Well, I'll think about that and come back and see you." I went home and told my roommate about it and he said, "Are you out of your mind? Of course you should do it!" Reed had encouraged me also. He said, "Yes, you have the qualities to do it. You can do it. I'm sure you can." I went back the next morning and said, "Okay, I'll do it." I started then immediately the next semester in the masters program at the University of New Mexico, again in Government and Public Administration, but this time with a minor in history. I completed that master's program in three semesters.

I spent the summer of 1948 as a junior reporter for the Albuquerque Tribune, which still publishes, along with the Albuquerque Tribune. (Albuquerque is still a two newspaper town.) I decided to work that summer, and I went around town looking for a job. They weren't plentiful, and students who had acted more quickly than I already filled the available positions. It was my first experience looking for a job, and I was really green at that. I was lucky again. I walked into the Tribune one afternoon in June and introduced myself to the Publisher, Dan Burrows. He talked with me for awhile, and then sent me to talk with George Baldwin, the Managing Editor. The next day Burrows called me up and told me to come down to work the following morning. I was paid \$30 a week, and promptly was assigned to writing obituaries. Seven or eight of us worked in a little city room, about the size of a large family room today. That job was very educational because as each of the regular reporters went on vacation, I took over their beat for a week so I got all around the town in the course of a summer. The only two beats I did not cover were Sports and Society. Those two reporters would not allow that. I think that the Sports reporter, Carlos Salazar, did allow me to attend one evening game of the Albuquerque Dukes, the double A baseball team there at the time, and file a very brief account mainly consisting of box scores.

That fall I began work on my master's thesis, which was on the regulation of mineral resources in the state of New Mexico. That was very interesting. My research was original, and I traveled all over the State - - to the potash mines around Carlsbad, to the Kennecott Copper open pit mine near Silver City, to the deep well operations in Lea County and the shallow well, small producer operations in Farmington and Artesia, as well as to the Office of Public Lands in Santa Fe, the State capital. I learned all about the Interstate Oil Compact Commission, the regulation of the production of petroleum, and how that was managed to keep the federal government out and in effect to allow the oil industry to police itself. That knowledge became very interesting 30 years later when the oil embargo took place in 1971. I could understand much of what was going on.



Anyway, I was going along thinking I'm going to complete this masters degree and then I'll go into government service somehow or another. I was living with a married couple, a man by the name of Richard Barrett and his wife Shirley who had worked in Washington during the war. Dick Barrett had all kinds of physical disabilities that had made him a 4-F, so he didn't have any military service. He was also a pacifist, so had he been eligible for the draft, he would have sought classification as a conscientious objector. He had ended up at UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, during the early days when Fiorello La Guardia, the former mayor of New York, became the director. Dick had met a lot of people in Washington so he was very knowledgeable and a good advisor on how to get into the bureaucracy, the things you should do, and so on. In the spring of 1949 a man by the name of Melbourne Spector who was a close friend of Dick Barrett (they had worked together at UNRRA and he was from Albuquerque) returned...

Q: His father was a jeweler there, wasn't he?

CUNNINGHAM: That's right, his father was a jeweler. Mel came back to Albuquerque to marry his high school sweetheart. This was a very big event. He came over to the house one evening to see Dick. Mel at that point was working in the Department of State personnel. He got to talking about the Department of State and the personnel system; how they were expanding and looking for people, promotion from within, and all the of the attractions of working for the Department of State.

That kind of rekindled my interest so after Mel returned to Washington, I asked Dick for Mel's address and I wrote to him. I'm rather cautious about all of these things. I don't know why I didn't grab him at the moment. At any rate I wrote to Mel and said I would like to hear more about that and really I had been interested for a long time in the Department of State. He sent me a Form 57 and said to fill it out, send it in, and wait. I did that and about a month later the Department of State security investigator came around and interviewed me and other people in town at the newspaper where I had worked, and so on. He checked out my references. I didn't hear anything. I had corresponded with Mel and he said come on into Washington, it looks like a pretty good thing. Dick Barrett encouraged me to do so also. And there was nothing in New Mexico to hold me there, although by then I had become strongly attached to the State, and I still have a great fondness for it.



Off I went to Washington in the summer of 1949, as it turned out right after my parents celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in California. I again arrived on the first of July and went into the Department of State personnel. They said, "Oh yes, we have all of your papers here. Everything is ready, but we are not hiring. The Congress has not passed the appropriation so there is a freeze on hiring." I went back to Randall House where I had lived two years previously and found a room again. I got out my portable typewriter and went out and got a bunch of Form-57s, the standard U.S. Government applications form, from the Civil Service Commission, carbon paper, and typed out sets of them. I started out down at the bottom end of Pennsylvania Avenue. I think I went to see my congressman. Dennis Chavez was a senator at that time and I went to see him. His staff aid said I should go to the CIA so I went over and had an appointment here in this building that used to be over by the Department of State. I've forgotten the name of it now.

Q: It was on I Street.

CUNNINGHAM: Right. I had an interview there. Then I started canvassing Federal agencies, beginning at the Federal Trade Commission at the bottom end of Pennsylvania Avenue. It was a very interesting experience. Nobody was hiring so all the personnel officers had time to talk and they passed me on to other people whom they knew at other agencies. I learned a lot about the federal government just through that process.

Eventually I ended up at the Atomic Energy Commission and they were at that point building Richland, Washington and they needed administrators for this town that they were developing out there, town managers and so on. Those interviews went along very promisingly and late in August, or early September around Labor Day, I received a call from the Atomic Energy Commission and they made a job offer to me. I guess they called me in and they offered me a job but there was something about it and it wasn't definite. Either I didn't accept it at that point, or they didn't make it firm but it looked very good. I went back to Randall House and I found a call from Department of State personnel waiting for me. I called up and they said they were ready to hire and they wanted me on board. The Atomic Energy Commission would have paid me \$2,925 a year; that was the salary that they were offering. The Department of State was offering me \$2,850 a year as an FSS-13, Foreign Service Staff 13, the lowest rank. Although AEC was more money, State was what I wanted and had for a long time, so I took that.

I went down a couple days later to the old temporary building on the corner of 23rd and C and was sworn in by Marvin Will along with two other people whom I do not recall now, and I was in the U.S. Foreign Service. The interesting thing was up to this point I had heard nothing about the Foreign Service examination. I did not know the distinction between Foreign Service officers and Foreign Service staff. I was brought on as an FSS-13 clerk typist and sent to FSI to polish up my typing skills to be a good clerk in the Foreign Service.



Q: You came in when?

CUNNINGHAM: September of 1949. I spent about a month at FSI an then was sent to Prague to be pouch clerk at the American embassy there.

Q: You were in Prague from when to when?

CUNNINGHAM: From October of 1949 until May of 1950.

Q: What was life like there during this time? How did you find liflike there?

CUNNINGHAM: The day that I arrived set the tone for the seven months I spent there. Three of the Foreign Service staff at the Embassy met me at the railway station that evening in October. I had come up from Paris on the Orient Express. With me on the train also were George Speshok and his wife. George was the newly assigned Security Office at the Embassy.

The Embassy group that met us at the railway station said, "Welcome to Prague. The Third Secretary of Embassy (Ike Patch) has been declared persona non grata and has three days to get out. A civilian (a naturalized American of Czech birth) has been arrested as a spy and is in jail." And they told me something similar had happened to a third Embassy staff member. Then they said, "Now we're going to the party." Off we went to the home of Dale and Sarah Fisher. The Fishers were a very popular and respected couple. Dale was either third or second secretary of the Embassy, I believe in the Political Section. The Fishers had two or three children at the time. They acted as elder brother and sister to the young singles, like myself, in the Embassy. By the time we arrived from the railway station the party was in full swing. I remember it as a lively and cheerful gathering, and I particularly remember the warmth and friendliness with which the Fishers welcomed me. Dale Fisher was killed in an airliner crash in Ethiopia a few years later. Several years later I returned to the Department on consultation from overseas, and there was Sarah Fisher managing the Foreign Service Lounge. She remembered me immediately and welcomed me with the same generosity and sincerity with which she had received me into her home on my first evening in Prague. She and Dale were truly fine people, loved by all who knew them, and devoted to the Foreign Service and its people.



I found Prague very grim, although not so much for myself. First of all we were conscious of being under constant surveillance, all of the time. I had to live in the Alcron Hotel for a long time. You could not go out and rent a house just off the market, you had to have permission from the Foreign Ministry to find a house and there was some kind of rigmarole that was involved though I don't recall the particulars now. Government permission was necessary and it was granted for only a limited period of time. There was one woman, Ann Stoyak, who later married Norman Getsinger, a Foreign Service officer and Chinese language officer. Ann is now deceased sadly who was moved 13 times. Ann was fluent in Slovak, and she was a first generation American, I think from Pittsburgh. Her family had come from Carpathia, as I recall, now a part of Ukraine. Ann wanted to visit her Grandmother who was still living there. Carpathia, then on the border of the Soviet Union, was considered a sensitive area. I don't recall whether a travel permit was required to go there, but it definitely was a place where the Czech authorities didn't want Slovak-speaking Americans roaming around. I think Ann did make it down there, and that made her highly suspect in the mind of the Czech authorities. So they constantly forced her to move. They were really trying to get her out of the country. There were those conditions for one thing that were very depressing in a way.

The people in the embassy were really remarkable. Everybody had a university degree it seemed to me in those days regardless of rank and regardless of position. There was very little differentiation on a personal level between ranks. We were all friends. The morale was extremely high and there was very great solidarity. Many people were very kind to me. I remember particularly Mary Vance Trent, who was third secretary in the embassy at that time, who was somebody who encouraged me a great deal. Also Sydney Sober who was a political officer was there at that time. There was very strong solidarity and no apartness of any kind based on rank or anything else.

We had very little contact with the Czechs although there was one guy, Jack Crockett (Thomas J. Crockett, III), a USIA cultural officer, who I thought was quite remarkably adept at getting to know people in the Czech community and had a very broad range of contacts who knew a lot about what was going on. I did not get to know any Czechs on a personal basis except Mrs. Tumova, who owned the apartment in which we were housed by the Czech authorities. It was a very elegant apartment in downtown Prague. Her way of protecting her ownership of that apartment was to have foreign diplomats living there, and she kept house for them. The Czech people at that time, their manner was very downcast and pessimistic. This is kind of a trait, I understand, among the Czechs, who tend to look upon the gloomy side of life just naturally.



In any case, there was nothing in the shops to speak of except in the shops where you used foreign exchange. My recollections of Prague in those days were of people all draped in black trudging back and forth along snow-covered streets. I was there at a bad time of the year. It was wintertime. I arrived in October and left in May so I saw Prague in its least attractive time of year; gloomy, short days, and smoke in the air from industrial plants located all around the rim of the city added to the gloom.

On the other hand I used to go on various little guided tours. Prague is a great outdoor museum and it was just a thrill to be in this medieval European city with artwork on every corner. In that sense it was a tremendous education and advantage to me, a real opening. I was just a country boy from California. I had been east of the Mississippi only twice and this was the second time. I had never been outside of U.S. territory in my life. This was a great thrilling experience for me to see all of that. I studied some Czech and I found that an extremely difficult language. I had already by that time studied Latin, Spanish, French, and Russian, so Czech really seemed very tough with all the case endings and the nuances in them.

There are only two events that stand out in my memory as relieving in any way this kind of atmosphere of gloom. One of them was one evening when we went to hear one of the orchestras in Prague. I don't think it was the philharmonic; I think it was one of the radio orchestras. A visiting Italian conductor led the orchestra, and it played at the conservatory. Here were all the students lined up on a balcony behind the orchestra watching the musicians perform. They were young, about my age, and that attracted my interest. The Sorcerer's Apprentice was one of the works on the program that evening. Afterwards the man who ran the commissary in the embassy who had a doctorate of history or something, met us outside and asked us how we liked the performance. We said it was very exciting. He said, "I'm sure the audience understands it. You know" he said, "the story is of a revolution." His implication was that the Czechs wanted to throw off the shackles of the Russians, but the Czechs were not prepared to do that by themselves at that point at all.

The other was one evening when Jack Crockett took me to a high school graduation of some friend of his or some contact of his in the class; I don't remember the circumstances. He told me it was a black tie affair. We went through these dark and gloomy streets of Prague and into this auditorium, this ballroom, and it was aglow everywhere with crystal chandeliers. Here were people dressed in formal dress. It was like the top-notch social event of the year. The parents were all in the boxes around the side admiring their daughters and sons down below. Everybody was wearing jewels. I had never seen such splendor or elegance, or such a display of wealth. I couldn't understand how people could dare to do this under the circumstances in Prague with this terrible oppressive atmosphere that you felt everywhere. I've never been able to reconcile that or explain that to myself ever since. I guess I commented on it to Jack and I don't remember what he told me about it. I suppose some day I should get back to him and ask him to explain all that to me.



Q: Did you ever find somebody trying to trap you or something from the Czech secret police?

CUNNINGHAM: It was a concern always for everybody in the embassy but it never happened to me. We all felt that we were constantly watched and followed. There were black Skoda automobiles all over the city, which were said to be owned by the secret police. Everywhere there were guys in black leather long coats that were said to be members of the secret police. It was nothing at all unusual to be walking down the street and find other people so garbed walking along the street behind you or otherwise. You did feel this constant sense of fear and apprehension everywhere.

One evening in the hotel room I was talking with Mary Vance Trent and I made some remark. She tried to keep the conversation away from what I was talking about because it was assumed that the hotel room was bugged. One night about 2:00 A.M. one of the code clerks who lived in the Alcron received a call from the embassy guard saying a NIACT, a night action message, had come in and he would have to come in and decrypt the thing. The clerk got dressed and went downstairs. As he walked into the lobby from the elevator the desk clerk said, "Your taxi is at the door." The clerk had not called for a cab nor given the desk any prior indication he would be going out. There were other incidents of that kind.

Q: I thought we would end this and we will pick it up the next time when you are off to France in 1950.

CUNNINGHAM: Right, and maybe a little more about the evacuation from Prague.

\*\*\*

Q: Today is the 4th of June, 1998. Bill can we talk about the evacuation from Prague in 1950?

The seven months I was in Prague from October 1949 to May 1950 coincided with a period when our relations with the Czechs very seriously deteriorated. There were constant allegations in the press that the U.S. was spying on Czechoslovakia. In January of 1950, the authorities arrested two senior local employees of USIS. Eventually the Czechs charged them with espionage. Of course this was the early years of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which turned out to be very Stalinistic. They were charged with espionage and were put on trial as I recall in March or April of 1950. In the course of that trial, which lasted for several weeks, virtually everyone of any importance in the embassy was alleged to be a spy. A lot of that came about through rigged questions that were put to these two Czech employees. They were eventually sentenced and then the trial was over.



In late April of 1950 a Foreign Ministry courier delivered a note to the embassy about 3:00 P.M. one Friday afternoon. I was by that time working in the file room of the embassy. The routine always was first to send the Ministry's notes up to the file room for them to be logged in, and then to send them downstairs to an appropriate action officer. Two things about this note were unusual, and their importance was realized only in retrospect. The first was that it had arrived late, and with no fanfare or indication of priority. The second was that it came without an English translation. The Foreign Ministry had not followed a consistent practice with respect to accompanying translations. Sometimes they were provided; sometimes not. The pattern was entirely random. My colleague, Patricia Mostosky, (now Mrs. Peter W. Bush of Seattle, Washington) and I logged the note in, and we sent it downstairs to the Czech language officer in the Embassy; we had three or four of them I guess. Somebody looked at it, made kind of a cursory translation about it, and said "They are demanding that we reduce our staff by two thirds," and that word filtered back upstairs to Patricia and me. The embassy shut down at the end of the day, completely normally, and everybody went off for the weekend. They said we will take care of this when we get back on Monday. I do suppose, though I do not recall for sure, that a summary of the content on the note was sent by telegram to Washington.

That weekend, as a matter of fact, a number of us went up to a villa that we had near the Polish border. It had belonged to some wealthy Czech family and had been made available through a complicated process to the American embassy as an R&R spot so that it would stay out of the hands of the Czech government; so that it would not be taken over by the Czech authorities. We were up there and nobody paid much attention to this. We had a good time and all came back to town.

Work began in a very normal way the following week. Word got around that this note demanded that we reduce our staff by two thirds because the state of relations between Czechoslovakia and the United States as indicated by this trial no longer justified representation of the level that we had there. There were about 85 Americans in the embassy at the time and about 120 local Czech employees.



Somebody said, I guess we should start getting rid of some of these files here, so I started cleaning out some files and looking for some things that weren't particularly important. There was a lot of stuff. I did know that one burned files when embassies were evacuated so I was kind of waiting for these instructions but nobody was very excited. As an aside it is very interesting that an FSS-13, which is what I was at the time, although I did have a masters degree in government and public administration and had served a year in the Navy as a commissioned officer, was allowed that much discretion to just weed stuff out and discard it. I'm not really sure we made all the right judgments at the time. We had something like 15 or 20 bar-lock filing cabinets that were crammed full of stuff all the way from unclassified to I guess top secret, though I'm not sure. Work went on in a very desultory fashion for the week. I do recall, and I thought it a bit odd, that no response to the Foreign Ministry's note went out from the embassy all week. I also was not aware of any cable traffic back and forth to Washington. I suppose one should keep in mind that most communication went by diplomatic pouch in those days. We did not have electronic transmission facilities in the embassy. Once telegrams were encrypted, they were taken to the telegraph office and sent to Washington. Also, we had a budget for telegrams, so the pressure was on to keep them short and few in number. Friday afternoon the week after the note had arrived, the ambassador was summoned over to the Foreign Ministry.

Q: The ambassador was who?

CUNNINGHAM: Ellis O. Briggs. He was a Latin Americanist - - had spent his entire career in that area. His last post before Prague had been Montevideo, where he had been Ambassador. Briggs went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they said to him, "We sent you a note." He said, "Yes, I got the note." (This is hearsay. This is what I was told was said.) "We sent the note back to Washington and we are waiting for further instructions." They said, "Well we want you to reduce your staff by two thirds in all categories," which meant also the Czech employees, "within a reasonable time." (Ambassador Briggs said, "We are working on that." They said, "Reasonable time expires at midnight Monday and we can not be responsible for the security of your staff after that time." The ambassador protested saying this was not reasonable, and so on and so forth. I saw the reporting telegram of the ambassador's conversation with the ministry so now I am citing from recollection. It made a very deep impression on me at the time. They said, "When you shut down our consulates in Chicago, Cleveland, and Baltimore, you gave us ten days. We protested and you said that was reasonable time. Reasonable time is 10 days from the day you got the note. That is midnight Monday and we will not be responsible for the safety and security of your personnel." The ambassador protested some more and they said, "Look here, you are not dealing with Uruguay any longer. You are dealing with a fraternal socialist country," etc., etc. and they carried on in this fashion.



There was panic in the embassy when the information of this meeting at the Foreign Ministry got around the corridors. Briggs came back to the embassy and drafted a highly classified telegram, which requested instructions. The code room in the embassy was right next to the file room. You had to go through the file room to get to the code room. Although Patricia Mostosky and I were never allowed in there because we didn't have the proper clearances, we could hear those code machines clattering and making all the racket that they used to make through the doors. The Ambassador's telegram, which he classified Top Secret, came up after a while from his office and was taken in the code room. By then I think it was well past closing time.

A man by the name of John Horan, a Boston Irishman, was the chief code clerk and also responsible for control of all Top Secret messages. He was a fairly bureaucratic fellow, as I recall, sticky about all sorts of things that the rest of us thought were kind of picky. His assistant was a woman by the name of Grace Edwards who now lives in Arizona. She was a close friend and roommate, as a matter of fact, of Patricia Mostosky who was my colleague in the file room. I believe they owned a car together.

When Briggs' telegram arrived for encryption and Grace Edwards read it, her eyes just grew wide in amazement. We were all very young people and Grace, who grew up on a farm in a very rural part of Oregon, wondered what in God's name is going to happen to us now? Here she is the roommate of the file clerk and she knows about this but what about her roommate? Obviously everybody is going to be affected in some way and so far as we knew Tuesday morning would find us all in a Czech jail someplace. That was Grace's thinking at the time. I should add that Grace was no shrinking violet. She was not so much frightened as astounded. Nothing like this had ever happened in the part of Oregon where she had grown up. Grace persuaded John to call the two of us (Patricia and me) in and they showed us this message. John said, "You can not say anything at all about this, absolutely nothing at all about this message." Out it went.

I am trying to remember, that evening after work we all went off to a nearby pub to have dinner and a couple of beers. There were four of us in the group one of whom was Ann Stoyak.

At any rate, the four of us were having a beer and unspoken on our minds was this situation and our concern, apprehension, tension, and excitement about what was going on. In the bar we dared not say a word about it so we talked about other things; I have no idea what we talked about. . I remember only that none of us dared to say a word about the situation of which we now were aware or in any way let on in public that anything was going on. This was not something of which we had to remind one another or pledge one another. It was a sort of unspoken, conscious compact.



What I do remember about that evening was that there was a young Czech soldier in the bar and he invited Ann to dance with him and they did a fantastic czardas there in the bar, then somehow or another we all went our way home. I think everybody was summoned into the embassy Monday morning. The ambassador convened a meeting of the staff to tell them what had happened and that we were going to have to carry out this evacuation. I think the sequence of events is that Briggs reported the note to the Department of State. A reply came back with instructions to press for an additional period of time. He got agreement from the Foreign Ministry for an extension of another ten days, which carried us well into May up to the 10th of May. After these instructions had come back and an extension had been obtained, a meeting of the entire American staff of the embassy was convened. The ambassador explained to us what was going on. What I remember very distinctly is that Briggs broke down in tears in this meeting and apologized to the staff for what had happened to them. He was clearly unable to continue to conduct that meeting, and I do not recall that he gave us any direction or instructions as to how to proceed.

The other thing that I remembered is that the ambassador at that point left the room. He was ushered out, escorted out, or something. James K. Penfield who was the deputy chief of mission took over the meeting and really took charge. He said, "Okay, this is how we are going to carry it out. You are going to do this. You are going to do that," and so on. He answered all questions. He was gentle about this, but he was very strong and forthright. I had great respect for Mr. Penfield after that incident. The way in which he took command reassured everyone. It was, I think, a classic example of leadership in a tense and uncertain situation. The United States I suppose had evacuated some diplomatic posts previous to that time, but in the post-war period probably Prague was one of the first where we had to carry out such a large-scale evacuation under that kind of duress.

In those days we were not accustomed to evacuating diplomatic posts. There wasn't any drill for it and Penfield had to work it all out on his feet. He did a superb job of maintaining morale, organization, discipline, and esprit de corps in the embassy. I give him very high marks for that. I don't know whether he ever got the credit for it that he deserved or not, but he sure as hell did a magnificent job.

Of course work picked up very quickly in the embassy. We destroyed a lot of files up in the file room. We all knew what we were doing. People's effects had to be gathered together. They had to be packed up and assembled in the embassy. People were assigned various duties and it went off very well. We met the deadline for the evacuation from Prague. Frank Siscoe was the Administrative Officer at that time, and he was another strong, calm figure in these uncertain circumstances.



The Czechs left it to us to select the people to leave. Of course just about all of the American staff volunteered to stay and we were thanked for that, but about 60 of us had to leave. I was among those whom the embassy and Washington decided should go. It was a particularly tragic situation in the case of the Czech employees of the embassy because many of them were people who had worked in the embassy since the '20s and '30s. They had been with the embassy since the founding of it. When the Second World War came, the embassy was shut down of course. The Czech employees had in many cases been very helpful to people leaving at that time. They had remained loyal. They had come back to the embassy when it reopened in 1945 and some of them were just short of eligibility for retirement by 1950. A lot of compassionate work was done I understand at that point trying to solve the problems of those people. Upon leaving the embassy, they were going to be sent off to labor camps somewhere under the work permit system that the Czech government had. They were assigned to very mundane positions of drudgery in humiliating conditions. One, a very senior employee a silver-haired gentleman, said to me "You have the atomic bomb. Why don't you just drop it on the Kremlin and solve the whole problem?" I was dumbfounded by his statement, and I don't recall what I said, although it showed me the state of his desperation and distress.

I remember very well a young man by the name of Karel Prohaska, who was one of the chauffeurs of the embassy and was somehow associated with my roommate at the time, a man by the name of Keith Corley, who was in the military attaché's office. Karel was about my age, a young fellow. I remember talking with him one of the last afternoons that I was in the embassy. He was there with his girlfriend in a vacated Embassy office. I said to him, "Karel, you've been awfully good to me." His English was quite good; I spoke no Czech. "If there is anything I can ever do to help you out, let me know." His girlfriend immediately hushed us and pointed to the telephone. Here we were in the American embassy and there was such a climate of fear on the part of people that she believed that it was entirely possible that the telephone on the desk between us was tapped, even though it was on the hook, and that people would be able to pick up the transmission of what we were saying.



I have no idea what happened to Karel Prohaska or any of the other people in the embassy at that time. There were some who escaped. I saw one month later in Paris. She was the fiancée and later married a captain in the air force attaché's office. Her story was a chilling example of risks people took, I suppose some unsuccessfully, to escape from behind the Iron Curtain. She said that she had paid someone to get her out of the country by crossing over the border. They had escorted her on a certain day, followed by a moonless night, all this business, up to a point that was something like three or four miles from the border at which point they said to her, "Okay, now you head in that direction through the woods." She did as she was told and after awhile, through the darkness, she saw a guard approaching as she was getting very close to the border. She said she turned her back toward him and crouched down on the ground to look as though she was part of the vegetation and kind of blend with it. She said, "I waited a long time. I expected him to come up from behind and take me. After a very long time nothing happened and I looked around and no one was there. I have no idea whether he saw me and decided to allow me to go, or whether he didn't see me and I was successful." She said she then crossed the border. It was a real ordeal, that experience.

We were evacuated to Frankfurt, Bad Homburg as a matter of fact, in West Germany. Patricia Mostosky, Grace Edwards, and I rode in Patricia's car down first to Nuremberg, then to Frankfurt, which was the designated collection point for us. People went various ways. Many of them drove personal automobiles loaded up with as many belongings as they could and went on their way. I guess some others were flown out, and some went out on the attaché's plane. It wasn't the kind of evacuation you have now where the Marines come in and you have an air force transport unit lifting everybody out. You were on your own. It was an adventure and it was very exciting for us.

Patricia, Grace and I got to Frankfurt late in the day, as I recall. We parked downtown, outside of one of the HICOG operated hotels and went in to check in and get some dinner. We had arrived, and we felt safe and relieved. Then one of the unfortunate things happened. Patricia's car, parked outside had the backseat full mostly of clothing and personal items belonging to Grace and Patricia. My stuff had been loaded in the trunk of the car. While we were in the hotel, the car was broken into and everything that was inside the passenger compartment was removed. The girls lost practically all of their clothing and personal belongings at that point. That was a real letdown after we had successfully made our departure.

We were sent to Bad Homburg as the collection point in Germany for the Embassy evacuees. It's a spa outside of Frankfurt and we were told to wait there for further instructions. I was restless and I thought where are they going to send us? That was the big buzz at the time; where are they going to send us? What's going to happen now? I thought where would I like to be assigned? Of course we all talked about where we would like to be assigned.



By that time I knew enough about U.S. Government bureaucracy to realize that the Department of State would not know what to do with 50 surplus Foreign Service personnel suddenly dumped on its lap in West Germany.

I had taken one semester of French at the University of New Mexico. I thought there were an awful lot of Americans in Germany. The name of game in those days if you were in the Foreign Service was to get to someplace where there weren't a lot of Americans. We joined the Foreign Service to go abroad, and to be in another American colony, part of a big occupation bureaucracy in Germany, was not attractive at all. We didn't want to do that, or at least some of us didn't, and I didn't. I thought I know French and maybe I can get a job in the embassy in Paris, that would be kind of nice.

I went out and bought a train ticket to Paris. Other people in the evacuation group said to me, "You had better not do that. We are supposed to stay here. We are under orders." Well, I violated orders and went to Paris. I went into the American embassy and went up to see the personnel officer and said, "Here I am. I've just been evacuated from Czechoslovakia. I know some French. I have a master's degree in public administration and government. I am available and I would like a job. I've done this work on the Foreign Service staff," and so on. I said, "I'm not supposed to be here." He said, "Yes, I understand." He took down all the particulars and he said, "Go back to Frankfurt and wait."

I went back to Bad Homburg and waited. We thought we had about a week to wait for orders, so Patricia, Grace Edwards, and Jack Crockett, who worked for USIA and now is retired and lives up in Connecticut, took a little trip down the Moselle Valley through Trier, Luxembourg, then over to the Meuse Valley, perhaps going through Bastogne and Charleroi, up to Liege, and on to Aachen (or Aix-la-Chapelle), on to Cologne, then down the Rhine Valley back to Bad Homburg. It was a wonderful trip, and I cherish still the memory of visiting the seat of Charlemagne's rule. When we returned I found I had orders to go to Paris so off I went to Paris at the end of May 1950. I was the first of the evacuees from Prague to be reassigned, and everyone was envious - and some asked how I had arranged that.

Q: You were in Paris from 1950 to when?

CUNNINGHAM: I was in Paris from May of 1950 to November of 1950. I was first assigned to the budget section of the embassy and worked for a man by the name of Nicholas Fortucci, at the time I believe a local American hire of the Embassy. Nick was a very good boss, had a sparkling sense of humor, and was a good mentor to a young guy like me. Nick's supervisor was a man by the name of Arthur Scharff, the Embassy Budget Officer. Scharff was an opera buff and a wine connoisseur, always going off to some wine tasting experience in the South of France.



After a couple of months I was shifted from the budget section to the accounting section of the embassy where my boss was a woman by the name of Jessie Hairnet. We were under the general supervision of Joseph A. Dagenhart who was the chief disbursing officer at the embassy at that time, and also the chief disbursing officer for all U.S. Foreign Service posts in Western Europe. During the time that I was in Paris the war broke out in Korea and the embassy in Seoul of course was evacuated, but in great disarray. The government fled to Pusan. MacArthur staged his landing on the west coast at Inchon in September of 1950. A short time later the government moved back to Seoul after it was retaken, and the embassy moved back with it.

That led to my transfer two months later from Paris to Seoul. I'm told I was assigned to Korea solely because I was a bachelor. This is a story which I've been told was true although I've never seen the documentation on it. The ambassador to Korea at that time was John J. Muccio and his deputy was Everett Drumright, an old China hand. Muccio and Drumright at that time both were bachelors and it is reported that they sent a message to the Department of State saying this - - i.e. bachelor status - - as the primary staffing requirement for the embassy, which of course was going to be greatly enlarged in view of the war effort. There was a lot of economic assistance and other things going on. According to the story I was told their cable said, "This is a war zone and it is dangerous. No women or married men should be sent. Send only bachelors to fill all of these positions." In any case, no families could be sent to Korea, that was for sure, so that was the idea of sending only bachelors.

I was in Paris and I was a bachelor. On the second of November, Patricia Mostosky, my former colleague in Prague who had by now been assigned to Paris also, and who worked in the Embassy personnel office, called me up and said, "Guess what?" I said, "What?" She said, "We have orders transferring you to Seoul, TM-7." I said, "Come on, you are kidding me. What's going on here?" She said, "No, come on down here and I will show them to you." I went down there and sure enough there they were, depart in 10 days.

I thought it was awfully nice in Paris. I had absolutely no background in Asia. I had not studied Asia. I knew no Asian languages. I had no special interest in it. It was not in my vision to go out there when I joined the Foreign Service, at all. I knew nothing about it. There was no personal or professional qualification or interest that would take me there. I thought about this thing and pondered it a little bit.

Joe Dagenhart, who was the supervisor of my boss at the time, said to me, "I hear you've got orders to go Korea. That's a war zone. I'm a World War I veteran. I was in Chateau Thierry, Belleau Wood and all those other places. That's dangerous out there. You are a young man. I'm not so sure you ought to do that." That was really what convinced me because I realized that promotions come faster in war zones than they do elsewhere, and I was anxious to get ahead. So I said, "Well, Mr. Dagenhart, thank you very much. I appreciate that but I believe I should respond to a call of duty." The idea of going to a war zone did not frighten me.



Q: You were young. Hell I volunteered.

CUNNINGHAM: Sure. I had been commissioned by the navy. I had gone through the navy officer training program so I wasn't a neophyte so far as military affairs were concerned. Off I went on something like the 10th of November, as I recall, or the 12th. I made the ten day departure. I guess it was the 12th of November that I left Paris for Seoul via Rome where I had to pick up a British Overseas Airways Corporation DC-4 all the way out to Tokyo. That trip was an adventure in itself because we stopped at various places. We got stuck in Bangkok because the plane fell behind schedule. Night landings were not permitted in Hong Kong, our next stop, in those days, so we had to stay over for a while. A bunch of us who were dog tired by then and hadn't had any sleep for three days on the DC-4 boarded a bus and went down and took a night tour of Bangkok. We came back and got on the plane at something like 3:00 in the morning and flew off to Hong Kong. I was getting a real introduction to Asia.

I arrived in Tokyo after dark on the evening of the day we left Bangkok at 3:00 A.M. So here I was in Tokyo; now how do I get to Korea? Of course these were Occupation days. I suppose I had a Transportation Request for my onward travel to Korea, but I had no idea how to get there. Nor did I have a hotel reservation. I asked for the American embassy but there was no American embassy while Japan was under Occupation. Here I've got these orders and I'm supposed to go to Korea. I haven't got a ticket that takes me there. Where do I find some place to sleep? How do I find a hotel? The Occupation was running everything in Japan at that point and so I ended up at the Provost Marshal's office in downtown Tokyo and somehow or another got myself righted around. It took me about a week to finally to get a booking on a Northwest flight into Seoul.

I'm not sure what I did during that week in Tokyo. Most of it I spent trying to get to Korea. What I do remember is that somebody got a hold of me and said, "Now listen, they are very strict about things over there. You are wearing civilian clothes and that's a military zone. You had better go down to the PX and get yourself outfitted with a uniform. You've got to be in a uniform if you go over there." I said, "But I'm in the American embassy." "It doesn't make any difference. MacArthur (who in addition to being the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers in the Pacific Theater also was the Commander of United Nations forces in Korea) says everybody has got to be in uniform in Korea. You don't want to get shot or arrested as a North Korean spy."



I went with my meager travel allowance down to the PX, which was located in Ginza in what is now Mitsukoshi Department Store there on the main corner. The interesting thing I remember is that afternoon Claude Pepper, at that point U. S. Representative from Florida, was in the PX and he was on his way to Korea. He was being outfitted completely. Of course he had a very generous allowance so he was getting the whole regalia. I bought a pair of khaki pants or something, and a shirt. They kept telling me that this was not enough; I needed more than that. I think I bought a warm jacket.

Off I went to Korea eventually and I was put into the personnel office of the embassy there. Louis Benjamin was the chief of administration. We were busy as beavers trying to get things lined up to ship more Americans in and staff this embassy, which was at that time located in the Banto Hotel in downtown Seoul; that is where it had been before the North Korean invasion in June 1950. The top three floors of the hotel were quarters for the embassy staff so I was roomed up there. I had a room to myself and I was fairly comfortable. The officers club was on the top floor of the building. We used to gather up there in the evenings at 6:00 to listen to the AFRS, Armed Forces Radio Service news broadcast from Tokyo. It was a 6:00 p.m. broadcast and was our main source of information about the progress of the war.

I arrived in Seoul about a week before Thanksgiving and I remember the Thanksgiving edition of Stars and Stripes. The banner headline was "We Stand on the Yalu" and that was the point. That was the high tide of the U.N.-U.S. military campaign into North Korea. They had gotten all the way up to the Yalu River, the border between Korea and China, about that time. We stood there for about 24 hours and then the Chinese came in and the whole retreat began. As I said, I spent the first two weeks in this personnel office trying to get things set up to ship people into Korea and staff the embassy. After the retreat from the Yalu began, things turned around and I spent the rest of my time in Korea shipping people out as fast as I could.

I remember from that time, and it was quite a traumatic experience, seeing truckload after truckload of U.S. army trucks of soldiers coming through Seoul, right through an intersection about one block from the Embassy, headed south - - across the Han River. You have to understand that the ground freezes by the end of November in Korea. It is a cold place. These soldiers were standing up in open trucks being moved from the north of Seoul, through Seoul, and across the Han River. These poor fellows were dazed. Here was the great victorious American army and they did not know what had hit them with the Chinese coming into the war in the north. It was a very disturbing experience to see this happening.



The main Army post exchange was right across the street from the Embassy, and it was having sales all the time because it was collecting stock from all the post exchanges that were closing down elsewhere up in the front echelons and selling it off as fast as they could. There were all kinds of bargains. Finally about the middle of December the Post Exchange itself closed down and they pulled out. I remember quite vividly the last Sunday that I was in Seoul, the chapel where the military chaplains held Sunday services was located on the floor above the post exchange. I went over to I guess 9:00 mass or something like that to the chapel. At the end of mass the priest said, "The mass is ended, go in peace. We are leaving right after this service. I don't know where you guys are going to go to mass next Sunday but it won't be here." I thought to myself, well if the Post Exchange is gone, the army chaplains have pulled out, the American embassy is still here. What's going on? By this time you could hear gunfire in the hills at night around the city.

The Koreans were trying to get out. We evacuated a lot of our Korean national employees. Being in the personnel office I helped with part of that too. I went out one morning, I think it was a Saturday morning, to the rail yards where they were going to have a train to take our people south. I was expecting passenger cars to take our local employees (they are known nowadays by the title of Foreign Service Nationals) many of whom were very well educated people, cultured people. What they brought in for them was a whole string of cattle cars. I thought this is just unacceptable. There was manure all over the floor of these things. It was frozen hard, caked, but I thought we can't let the people in there. I grabbed a shovel and started shoveling it out. Somebody said to me, "No, no, no. Leave it alone. That is insulation. It will keep us warm going south." Recently in Texas I met a Korean woman who was a child of one of the local employees of the American embassy staff and she had a recollection of that evacuation that Saturday morning in 1950.

Q: Was there a concern in personnel to get rid of all the records of anybody associated with the Americans because I understand when our embassy left in June of 1950 there were a lot of records still around which brought very nasty things on those people, like visa applicants, or people associated with the embassy. We hadn't realized how awful it would be. I was wondering whether this was hanging over your head at this time?

CUNNINGHAM: The part of the office that I worked in dealt with American personnel only. Now that you bring that up, that rings a bell of some kind. I do remember hearing of those incidents although in what connection I can't really recall. I can't say. I just cannot certify as to whether there was an organized attempt to do that in the embassy. If there was, or if there wasn't, either way, I am not aware of it particularly.



This brings up another point. We had many male employees and the Korean government was unwilling to allow men of military age to leave the city. There was only one bridge operating across the Han River. On this particular evacuation train that I was speaking of, as I recall, it was women, children, and older men beyond military age. I do not recall any men of military age who were in that group. That is not to say that there weren't any but my recollection is of older people and women and children being in the evacuation group. There was only one bridge operating across the river and there was a very strong effort by people in the city to get out before it fell. I made many trips out to the airport in connection with the evacuation of our American staff and every time I crossed the river there were boats that were ferrying Koreans across the Han River. There was a big crowd on the north bank of the river, and on the south bank of the river there was a solid file of people, practically all women and children. In many instances, it was a woman with a child on the back, another by the hand, and the household belongs balanced on the head.

That scene of those young women and little children marching south across the treeless mudflats on the south bank of the Han River through the mountain passes to head south and get away is an indelible impression in my mind. Again, it was like the people that I knew in Czechoslovakia who were fleeing tyranny and oppression. These people were doing the same and I remember very well being told at the time that many of them would not make it all the way south; they would freeze to death at night in the mountain passes overcome by fatigue, hunger, or whatever and perish. I was only there until the end of December.

There was another experience that I had with regard to the evacuation of U. S. personnel. One man had been in Seoul before the attack in June, I think with U.S. Information Agency but I'm not sure. He came back of course when the embassy returned. He had developed very strong ties to Korean society and I think he had a fiancée<sup>1/2</sup> who was a Korean, and all the rest. The rumor was that this fellow was going to try to stay after the city fell. We wanted to get every single American out; this was towards the end. This was the last week before the city fell at the end of December and he was finally evacuated. It took very strong persuasive effort. A couple of people, I was among them, escorted him out to the airport. All the way out to the airport we kept saying, "You have to go," and he kept saying, "I want to stay. I have my fiancée<sup>1/2</sup> here and she has all her relations." We kept saying, "It is going to be harder on her if you do stay." Finally, very reluctantly, we got him on the plane. This was a night flight on Northwest Airlines. It left about midnight that night. I was out there on the tarmac helping to get people loaded onto the plane. I think it was more or less the last, or the next to last batch.

Q: We're talking about Kimpo airport.



CUNNINGHAM: Kimpo Airport outside of Seoul. It was a cold, cold night and we kept loading people and baggage onto this plane. The Northwest Airlines man was there next to me. This was either a DC-4 or a DC-6, which was standard at that time. We got this plane loaded up and it was about 11:30. They buttoned up and taxied off to the end of the runway. That plane made the longest takeoff run of any that I have ever seen. It went on, and on, and on, and on, and finally the Northwest Airlines manager standing next to me who realized how heavily loaded that plane was said, "break, break," hoping it would. Finally it lifted off just short of the end of the runway. We all heaved a sign of relief that it had gotten off safely and the people had gotten off to Tokyo.

Q: Were we trying to staff a new embassy down in Pusan?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Q: But most were being sent off?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. What happened was a field office had been set up in Tokyo for the American mission in Korea. Some of the staff from the embassy were sent to Pusan where we had a consulate and to where the government was going to retreat again, and the rest were sent to Tokyo to staff the field office over there. I was among those designated to go to Tokyo.

My evacuation was very unusual from Korea. Late in December I started feeling feverish, nauseous, ill, and so on. I didn't know what was wrong with me. For some reason in those days we wanted to stay away from the military hospitals so I turned into the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Seoul. The head of it was a man by the name of Dr. Roux who had been a long time medical missionary in Korea. They examined me and they were rather concerned. Finally they did a spinal tap on me and they said, "You have symptoms that resemble meningitis and the cell count in your spinal fluid is up. We think you should be evacuated to Japan." Of course the North Koreans were closing in on the city at that point so I was evacuated via marine hospital aircraft to Osaka. The ride in the military ambulance to the airport was just an agonizing experience because those things had no springs and all the roads in Korea were rutted. I really felt sorry for wounded men who have to be evacuated in military ambulances after that experience. I got on the plane. I was kind of woozy and feeling very strange.



I flew to Osaka and we were met and taken to the Osaka military hospital. Here I was with a whole bunch of guys who were war wounded coming back from the front and I was a State Department civilian. I was put in this military hospital. I began to feel much better and whatever it was began to pass and fade away. They looked at me and said, "Why are you here?" I explained the symptoms to them and they said, "Yes, yes, okay." The first thing I knew, they put me in the psychiatric ward of the hospital. At this point, I began to get kind of worried. I said, "I belong to the Department of State and I'm sure they want to know where I am by now," because things were getting pretty confused in Seoul by this point, "and I want to speak to the American consul in Osaka." "Oh, yes, yes, that's all right. We will take care of you here."

I protested and I finally got a hold of the American consulate in Osaka. They got in touch with Tokyo and the first thing you know I got a telephone call from Donald McCue, who was in charge of this field office that had been set up in Tokyo for the administrative services for the American mission in Korea. He said, "Cunningham, where in the hell are you and what are you doing there?" I explained the situation to him and he said, "We've been looking all over for you. We've lost you for 48 hours. Nobody knew where you were. We thought you might be in North Korea." I said, "No, don't worry about that." He said, "All right. We'll get you out of the hospital. You get on a train up here to Tokyo as quickly as you can."

I arrived in Tokyo on Christmas Eve, 1950. I had been two evacuations in one year in the Foreign Service. By this time I had been through three posts in my first year and a half in the Foreign Service. I was then assigned to this Field Office of the American Mission in Korea and continued to work with the personnel people there. It was located in the San Shin building in downtown Tokyo not far from the Dai Ichi building where MacArthur had his headquarters. As a matter of fact it was very close to the Provost Marshal's office where I first checked in the previous November.

I enjoyed working with those people very much, but the office was shut down then at the end of February, as I recall. The question was, what was going to be done with these Field Office people? Some were going to be sent to Korea. I wanted to be sent back to Korea because that is where I had been assigned. No, they couldn't use me in Korea. They were reducing staff at this point because they didn't have room for them over there in the Embassy, again located in Korea and reduced from the size it had been in Seoul a few months previously. They didn't want to maintain this office in Tokyo any longer either. Things had stabilized somewhat. I was then transferred to the office of the Diplomat Section of SCAP, which was run by William J. Sebald, career FSO, Japanese Language Officer and with the rank of Ambassador at that time.

Q: This was the Supreme Allied...



CUNNINGHAM: The Supreme Command for Allied Powers, Japan, Douglas MacArthur's headquarters. Japan was still an occupied country. MacArthur was still in the Dai Ichi Building down the street. The Diplomatic Section was what passed for the American embassy. Japan did not have foreign relations. In fact all of the other countries had missions that were accredited to the Diplomatic Section of SCAP and it served as kind of a conduit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This time I was assigned there to the general services section of the Diplomatic Section. We were trying to recapture some of our State Department property from the grip of the occupation forces and to acquire additional property for the eventual American embassy in Japan. I worked on some of that with the property manager and did various things that were not particularly interesting to me.

Q: You were in Tokyo from when to when?

CUNNINGHAM: From December of 1950 until April of 1951. Q: You were saying you were doing general services type work.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, in the Diplomatic Section of SCAP from the end of February until April. One day during this period I was down in the coffee bar and James Byrd Pilcher, who was at that time the consul general in charge of the consular section, came up to me and he said, "Young man I've been watching you." This was the kind of comment that always made a young fellow apprehensive, but Mr. Pilcher (or Jaybird, as his friends called him) was a cheerful and generous man with a bouncy personality. He said, "How would you like some really good consular experience?" I said, "Well, what do you have in mind Mr. Pilcher?" He said, "We need a vice consul up in Sapporo and I think you would do just fine in that job." Now I have a habit, and it occurred many times in my life prior to the Foreign Service, where I would hesitate and say, I'd like to think that over, so that's what I said to Mr. Pilcher. He said, "Why sure, but I've got to know soon." I said, "I'll come see you tomorrow."

I went home and I talked with my roommate about this. I have a habit of always asking roommates about this kind of thing. He said, "Why don't you take it?" I sort of relied upon my old navy experience and the slogans there was that you get more experience on a small ship and more responsibilities than you do on a big one. It is better to serve on a destroyer or on a minesweeper than it is on a battleship or an aircraft carrier.

I went back the next morning and I said, "Okay, Mr. Pilcher, I will do this." I had no idea what Sapporo was like. I had all of these experiences in Korea, Japan, and so on. I said, "Okay, I will do it."



Q: You might explain where Sapporo is.

CUNNINGHAM: Sapporo is the principal city of Hokkaido in northern Japan, in the far north. The entire island of Hokkaido is a single prefecture, and by far the largest in area of all of Japan's prefectures. Sapporo is the Prefectural capital, and the principal city on the island. We had a two-man consulate there. Off I went to Sapporo.

But before I did something else happened during this period in Tokyo that was very important and influenced the rest of my career. As I said I went to Korea with no background in Asia whatsoever and I didn't really even know what to expect. Despite the fact that it was a war zone, despite the fact that things were terribly troubled, I was quite fascinated by what I found in Seoul and I liked it. I reacted positively to it.

I was very impressed by what I saw in Japan. I am from California and there was an anti-Japanese bias that was rather strong in California to which I had been subjected, to debunk the capabilities of the Japanese. When I got to Tokyo I saw how by 1950 the Japanese had recovered to that point, restored their city, restored manufacturing capabilities, and were redeveloping their economy. In other words there was a level of development in Japan that impressed me strongly. I compared it to what I had seen in Western Germany where the destruction from wartime bombing was evident everywhere in major cities at that time; it was not evident everywhere in Japan at that time. There were a few places where you could see the damage but you had to look for it in Japan at that time. I was impressed by the industry, by the civility of the Japanese people, and by the sophistication of their whole economic system. I thought this is something important.

At that time Sophia (Jochi) University, which is one of the principal private universities in Japan, a Jesuit institution founded by German Jesuits, was conducting what they called the International Institute. It was night school. The Department of Army civilians who were working in Occupation Headquarters would conduct courses at Sophia University after work, as they do here in Washington, DC at George Washington and American University.



I decided to enroll in a couple of courses out there. I had time on my hands in the evenings. There wasn't all that much to do and I didn't have that much money to spend. I enrolled in two courses for the spring term at Sofia. One was a course in economics and the other was a course in the history of the modern Far East taught by a man by the name of Lawrence Battistini. Battistini was a Ph.D. in Chinese history from Brown University. He was also the head of the historical division of SCAP. Battistini was a real Sinophile and a man of great enthusiasm and real dramatic flair so that every lecture was a memorable event. He particularly stressed the achievements of Chinese civilization and the great advances that they had made, and how Asia had suffered from the colonial and imperialist intrusions of the late 19th and early 20th century. That was a very strong theme in his course. He made a very deep impression on me. I was not able to finish the course because Pilcher's offer came along in mid-semester so I had to leave to go to northern Japan. That was an experience that really crystallized an interest in Asia in me. Battistini's course started me doing a lot of self-study and reading, and accumulating materials on Asia.

I went to Sapporo and this was a good experience for me because it gave me a chance to finally do what I considered to be really professional Foreign Service work; the kind of thing that I wanted to do. I wasn't especially interested in doing administrative work because I was more interested in the diplomatic side. In Sapporo we were a very busy consular office. There were just the two of us. The late David Osborn, who later became ambassador to Burma, was the consul there. He was the second consul. William Magistretti had opened the consulate about a year previously. I got the chance to do consular work and Osborn said to me, "Well you took this course in economics at Sophia University so you might as well be the economics reporting officer also." I took a course though I hadn't finished. That was the extent of my qualifications. We had a young army corporal for the first five or six months that I was there who served as the secretary for the consulate. We had four Japanese local employees including Homma-san, the driver; Takeuchi-san, the principal clerk; Aoki-san, one of the Visa clerks; Takahashi-san, the other Visa clerk; and Terashima-san, principal translator and analyst in the Consulate. Aoki was a war veteran he had been with Japanese infantry in Burma. His father-in-law was a legal U. S. resident dentist in Ogden, Utah. Terashima-san was a debonair man with a Continental air. He was fluent in French and an amateur photographer. He was an older man - - in his fifties. Takeuchi was a young fellow, probably too young to have served in the Japanese forces. He was very Western-oriented and was a square dance aficionado, president of the Sapporo square-dancing society.

Just at this time the legislation that permitted the regularization of unions between American soldiers and Japanese women had come into effect so we had a steady stream of them coming in. There was a regular routine that had been set up and it was already in operation by the time I got there. There was a military camp on the outskirts of Sapporo, Camp Crawford, and that was where many of these military personnel were stationed. Others of them were stationed in various offices around Hokkaido and in fact northern Honshu. I'm not sure whether our consular district extended there or not.



The regular routine was they would come in with the necessary documentation to have their marriage regularized under Japanese civil law. They would sign documents in the consular office and we would then execute a certificate of witness to a marriage, which provided an official American documentation of this union. That would be the first day. The second day they would come back and file in many cases a report of birth for one, and frequently two children, to certify the American citizenship to which these children were entitled through their fathers. I executed many reports of birth for the children of these unions. The next step was to prepare the non-quota immigration visa for the Japanese spouse and to take an application for a passport. We did not have authority to issue passports. That was reserved to the Consular Section of the Diplomatic Section in Tokyo. We did over 100 of these cases in the one year that I was in Sapporo in that consulate.

There were all kinds of situations so I really got an exposure to that kind of work. David Osborn did the political reporting. He was a Japanese language officer, and an extremely skilled one; I was not. I took care of the administrative work. After a time the army corporal was transferred elsewhere and we had no one to act as a typist or a secretary so what we really did was our own typing. If there were strikeouts in diplomatic dispatches, there were, that's all there was to it. We couldn't do anything about it. That was a good experience.

Q: You were there from April of '51 until when?

CUNNINGHAM: Until May of 1952. During my first tour in the Foreign Service, which lasted almost three years, I was in five posts and had about six different jobs. I covered a lot of administrative work and consular work. There was one complication with this appointment to Sapporo. I may have been an FSS-12 by the time this took place. Osborn needed a signing officer, someone with the authority to sign all the consular documents we processed in connection with these marriage cases, so that he could go on field trips and devote himself to political reporting, which was the main reason why he was there. Sapporo was a lookout post - - watching for signs of Soviet efforts to infiltrate either from Sakhalin or the "Northern Territories" the four islands claimed by Japan and occupied by the Soviets off the Northeast tip of Hokkaido.

I got up to Sapporo and they started to process an appointment for me as a vice consul and lo and behold I didn't have sufficient rank to be appointed as vice consul. I had to be at least an FSS-11 or something like that. What they worked out finally after I got there (this was discovered only after I got there) was a temporary promotion to an FSS-10 so that I would have sufficient rank to be made a vice consul and could do the signing work for Osborn. That was very nice because that meant of course some additional pay and I think there were a few allowances that came along with it. I lived in an occupation hotel. The army assigned us billets in those days in downtown Sapporo. I learned to ski while I was there; that was a new experience too. I really enjoyed the whole year in Hokkaido.



Q: You mentioned the marriages and all, and coming from California. During the war, there had been a great anti-Japanese prejudice built up, with sufficient reason, after the attack on Pearl Harbor and all, but I think one of the great phenomenons was that American troops, basically American men, came and fell in love with Japanese women. It wasn't just sex; it was the culture and all of that. You might say the prejudice and all didn't last very long at all.

CUNNINGHAM: There were some other very important things that happened as a result of the occupation. People like David Osborn, who was one of the "Boulder Boys," Owen Zurhellen, Richard Finn, Ed Seidensticker, Robert Scalapino were others...

Q: You're talking about Boulder, Colorado?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, Boulder, Colorado. They were guys who were trained in intensive programs in Japanese language by the military services to be interpreters for interrogating Japanese prisoners of war, and also to work on breaking the Japanese codes. These people after the war, and there were others like them... There is a man by the name of Jack Seward, who lives in Houston where I live now...

Q: Let me just stop for a second. You were saying there was something else?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. The people who were trained in Japanese for intelligence purposes during the war, in many cases afterwards became Foreign Service officers. They also became some of our leading scholars on Japan. They were all people who were in the military services, army, navy and so forth, and they became a very important contribution to our society.

I have had the experience recently of seeing the offspring of some of these unions between Americans and Japanese in the occupation period come back. There is a program now operated by the Japanese government to recruit English tutors to serve in Japanese high schools. In Texas where I have been one of the interviewers for candidates for this program, there have been several who have come through and said, "My mother is Japanese. I was born there. I want to go and see what my mother's country is like." In some instances the mother never spoke about the country at all. In some instances the mother retained a strong attraction to the country or association with the country, and the children knew their cousins and their grandparents there. This is another element in American society that provides a link to Japan that is coming about as a result of this occupation experience.



Something else that is happening too is that the World War II generation of Japan experts, people of my age, are all passing from the scene now. They are really out of the active business of fostering and nourishing the American-Japanese relationship. The program the Japanese government has instituted to bring young Americans to Japan as English language tutors has been going on now for about 11 or 12 years, and eventually is going to replace that generation. One of my students went on that program to Japan, and he has now passed the Foreign Service examination and has qualified in Japanese. He will be in the next A-100 class in July of 1998. I see that as part of an on-going continuum that is developing in a very interesting way.

Q: By the way while you were in Hokkaido was there any feeling about a communist movement up there or not?

CUNNINGHAM: Not so much about a communist movement though we were very conscious of the Soviet presence in two respects. The island of Sakhalin is just across from the northern tip of Hokkaido, and Wakkanai was a major intelligence listening post for the interception of electronic transmissions from Sakhalin.

Q: I almost got assigned there. I went to the army language school and took Russian just about the time that you were there. In '51 I was doing that and I was sent to Japan. I sure as hell didn't want to go to Wakkanai.

CUNNINGHAM: It was a bleak place. The other thing was that the northern territories, the four islands off of the northeast coast of Hokkaido, were a constant issue. We were always hearing about incidents where fishermen were taken captive by the Russian patrol boats up there. I remember Osborn made a couple of trips up there to report on the situation. There was not so much a feeling of a communist movement, as very strong consciousness of a Soviet presence, and in a way a kind of a Soviet menace. By this time, 1951-52, the war in Korea was fully under way, we were deep into the Cold War, and the divisions of Asia were becoming quite fixed at that point.

I'm trying to recall the governor of Hokkaido at that time, someone whom we knew. I think he may have been a member of the Socialist Party but I'm just not sure of that. I would have to check the record on that because I could be mistaken about that. He was a very personable man and, I suppose, a competent politician. There was a very strong army counterintelligence group there but I think that was directed more towards concern of some kind of Soviet attempt at penetration rather than concern about a subversive movement in northern Japan.

Q: You left Sapporo when?

CUNNINGHAM: May 5th or 10th, or something like that.



Q: Where did you go?

CUNNINGHAM: Of course I went on home leave first. I had a dilemma at this point. Before leaving Paris in November of 1950 I had taken the Foreign Service examination at the urging of someone in the embassy; I think it was Mary Vance Trent but I'm not sure. Someone along the line encouraged me to do this. I had not known when I entered the Foreign Service that there were Foreign Service officers and Foreign Service staff so I came into the staff corps but then I found out differently and I knew that I wanted to be a Foreign Service officer.

I took the examination just on a flier and with no expectation that I would pass it. It was a three and a half day examination. My French was not good enough for me to pass the language portion of the examination. As you know, in those days there were only five languages that were considered world languages and you had to pass in one of them. I left Paris immediately after taking the examination and I was in Japan when I learned that I had passed all but the language portion of the exam. Here I was on the other side of the world and I think I had a year to qualify in one of the "world" languages.

One of the other things that I did while I was in Tokyo was to hunt around for a French tutor. I found a Hungarian woman, Madame Damin, who knew French and was giving French lessons. She was my French tutor and I studied with her for a while. When I got to Hokkaido there weren't any French speakers around. I think there was a French commercial/consular agent up there but I didn't get to know him very well. I should have applied myself more diligently but I did not.

The upshot of all of this was that by 1952 the eligibility on the written examination had expired. I had to go to square one and start all over again because I didn't have enough French to meet the language requirement. I didn't have enough Spanish either though I had studied Spanish at the University of New Mexico. My French by this time was better than my Spanish so I decided that I had better emphasize that. When I got to Washington in the summer of 1952 and went into Foreign Service personnel in the Department, I said, "I want to pass the Foreign Service examination but I need a language to do it. French is the one I am working on and I don't want to leave Asia." They said, "Great, we will send you to Saigon." So I went to Saigon in September of 1952.

Q: How long were you there?

CUNNINGHAM: I was assigned there until November of 1954.



Q: How long were you actually there?

CUNNINGHAM: I was there all that time 26 months. The reason I say assigned there was because from July of 1954 to November of 1954 I was working half time in each of two posts - - in Phnom Penh and in Saigon. Again I was in an administrative capacity. When I arrived in Saigon I was assigned as a general services assistant so I was taking care of property, effects, shipping, all kinds of stuff like that, the usual general services work. It was a very large establishment that we had there. We had something like 20 or 25 residences and a couple of apartment buildings.

In the spring of 1954 the final military defeat of the French occurred at Dien Bien Phu and the five powers - Russia, the U.S., Britain, France and China - were convening in Geneva again to try to sort out the Asian situation in the wake of the Korean War which had concluded the previous summer in 1953 with the armistice agreement. They reached an agreement on Indochina. The deal was that the French would get out and that the three Indochina states would become fully independent sovereign countries. Up to that time they had been known as the Associated States of the French Commonwealth, or something like that.

The American ambassador in Saigon, Donald Heath, was accredited also to the governments of Laos and Cambodia. With the entry into force of the Geneva accords on the first of July 1954, U.S. diplomatic representation in Vientiane and Phnom Penh was to be raised to full diplomatic status and we were to have a resident ambassador in each of those posts rather than a chargé d'affaires.

The embassy in Cambodia on the first of July or the 30th of June, 1954 consisted of a chargé d'affaires, Joseph Montllor, a code clerk, another guy who was ostensibly an embassy staffer but was actually the CIA station chief though a very junior one, an AID representative, and a USIS officer. There were five Americans in the American country team in Cambodia at that time. All of this was going to change and a full embassy was going to be instituted there.

Robert McClintock, who was deputy chief of mission in Saigon at this time, was designated to be the first resident American ambassador in Phnom Penh. He had become aware of my work in the general services section of the American embassy and he said, "I know whom I want as my administrative officer. I want Bill Cunningham," who was at this time an FSS-11. I think I had lost the temporary ten and had fallen back to an 11. He asked me if I would like to do it and I said, "Sure." I felt confident that I could do it.



Off I went at the beginning of July to Phnom Penh. We used to have the CIA airline, Civil Air Transport or CAT, as it was known, which operated throughout Asia and it had a regular flight twice a week up to Phnom Penh. What I used to do was catch a plane Monday morning and fly up to Phnom Penh, work there until Thursday at noon, and catch the afternoon flight back to Saigon. Because I had no replacement in Saigon and they couldn't release me, I would work my job in Saigon Thursday evening, Friday, Saturday, and a good part of Sunday, then I would take off again on Monday morning to Phnom Penh to help them with their administrative work there. That was a real adventure.

The American embassy up until the first of July 1954 had been located on the second floor of a little downtown building in Phnom Penh not far from the banks of the Tonle Sap, which flows into the Mekong a few miles farther south. The office was over the top of a pepper shop that was owned by a French colonial woman, and the building faced the broad, tree-lined mall, which ran from the front of the railway station a kilometer away right down to the Tonle Sap. . She had been there for a long time and her husband started a pepper plantation. He died and she was a widow and she was selling pepper. She was a rather difficult person. There was no way that we could expand there and we had to find someplace else to put the embassy.

There was a building under construction elsewhere in Phnom Penh being erected by a Sino-Cambodian businessman. Montllor had thought of that building and said that would make a great building for our American diplomatic establishment that was going to be set up there. "But," he said, "it is only a two story building. If we could get him to add two floors to the building it will work and we will have enough space." I got a hold of the architect who was a Frenchman. He had designed the building and I talked with him. He said, "Yes, this foundation is strong enough and we can put two more floors on top of the building."

We then got in the midst of a very complicated deal to figure out how we were going to get these two floors added to this building and get it done in time to be able to accommodate the growing staff. People were already beginning to come up from Saigon and elsewhere to report in. We had to find some kind of office space for them because this space over the top of the pepper shop was not going to be adequate.

There was a lot of AID counterpart money around at that point. I can't remember all the particulars now but I became deeply involved with negotiations with the Sino-Cambodian businessman, the architect, and the AID comptroller to figure out some way whereby we could front money for the construction of the building and then credit that against the eventual lease payments that we would make to this businessman. We worked out a deal, and work began on the building with a total of four floors, configured to requirements of the Embassy. I managed to get this worked out about September or October.



Meantime, the U.S. official establishment was growing and I had to find temporary office space, so I started looking around town. Somebody said there was an abandoned Masonic lodge in the other part of town that would make pretty good temporary quarters for us. I went and looked it over, and negotiated a lease on that.

Now this Masonic lodge was a very substantial large two-story building and it was built in the colonial style, which is to say with 15 foot ceilings and very large windows that were closed by shutters. There were no glass windows in it, and there was no way of cutting off the outside air. You couldn't air condition the building without installing glass windows. That would be too expensive of a job to do, particularly since it was temporary space. What I had to do was get ceiling fans installed in the building and somehow or other make it comfortable. McClintock was very good about this.

The fortunate thing was that we moved in there in I think September of 1954 and about that time of the year the humidity begins to decline in Cambodia, and the weather becomes cooler. It becomes bearable, if you have a ceiling fan and dress informally. I had spent enough time up in Cambodia seeing friends over the previous two years that I knew that would work. My gambit was to get everybody into the old Masonic lodge over the cool months and get the four-story embassy building completed before the monsoon hit in April. In late March, early April, it really starts to heat up. By the middle of April you are just praying for the first rain in Cambodia to cool things off.

That year I worked harder than I think I have ever worked almost any other time in my life. I was working two jobs up until November. Finally a replacement for me in Saigon arrived in November and I was then able to move full time up to Cambodia and act as the administrative officer there.

Q: I would like to go back to your arrival now and then we will pick up Cambodia again. I would like to go back to September of '52 when you arrived. Who was ambassador? Can you sort of describe the atmosphere in Saigon at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: Donald Heath was ambassador to the three Associated States of Indochina - Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, resident in Saigon at that time. This war had been going on by then almost six years since the collapse of the negotiations between the French and Ho Chi Minh. The French were not making it; it was quite obvious.



It was not safe to travel in the countryside. In fact shortly before I arrived in Saigon two American women on the staff of the Embassy had been shot on the golf course, which was just on the outskirts of Saigon, by the guerillas. Whenever you went into a movie theater in Saigon in those days you were shaken down because it used to be a habit of the Viet Minh to go into the movies, carry a bomb in, and roll it down under the seats so that it would go off in the front of the movie theater. That had happened a few times. On rue Catinat (later Tu Do), here was a little hill that went down towards the Saigon River with open-air French style cafes on both sides. Viet Minh sympathizers or agents would sometimes ride by in cyclopousses and throw a bomb into the cafes as they went through. There were no incidents of this kind as I recall during the time that I was in Saigon but there had been earlier on and there were precautions of various kinds.

You could not travel outside of the city safely. You could go up to Dalat, which was the hill station, but you had to go by military convoy and they only went twice a week. I made that trip a couple of times. Sometimes it was safe to travel to Cap St. Jacques, now called Vung Tau, which was the beach resort down at the mouth of the Saigon River. In general the government... (end of tape)

Q: You were saying there were times you could travel?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, we could travel safely to other parts of South Vietnam at times, and other times you could not. I would say about half the time I was there, it was not safe to travel outside of the city of Saigon except in military convoy and even in some cases military convoys were not safe and were brought under attack. The French were very suspicious of our involvement in Vietnam. They felt we were trying to take over their colony for them, or in some way evict them from Vietnam. We were trying to assure them that we were not interested in displacing them, but we felt it was necessary to give the South Vietnamese more independence, more latitude, in order to be more willing to support the war against the Viet Minh. That was generally the atmosphere as I recall it at that time.

Q: Before the Geneva accords in '54, what was the situation? In '54 was all of Vietnam a French colony or did we have a real embassy there?



CUNNINGHAM: We had a real embassy in Saigon, yes, and a consul general in Hanoi. That embassy had been established in about 1950 at which time the French had changed the relationship of Vietnam to France to something like a commonwealth country. Bao Dai was on the throne still as the "emperor" of Vietnam, but there was a French governor general and the French had very strong influence over the governing of Vietnam. There was a civil Vietnamese Government, with a President, Vice President and legislature. Vietnam, however, was not a truly independent country and my impression was it was not even as independent as Canada was at the time. For example, the Vietnamese piaster was linked to the French franc and the French set the exchange rate for the piaster. The Vietnamese did not have independent control of the value of their own currency. There was the same kind of thing as the British practice, commonwealth preference, so far as the importation and exportation of goods from Vietnam was concerned. It was part of the Franc bloc and it was a possession of the French.

There were about 250,000 troops engaged in the military effort against the Viet Minh at the time. It was a combination of French troops, French colonials from Senegal, Algeria, and other places in the French empire, and Vietnamese troops. There was not an independent Vietnamese army. The army of Vietnam was established about 1953 when de Lattre de Tassigny came out and established the first battalion of an independent army of the Republic of Vietnam. Prior to that time all of the Vietnamese troops were simply troops in the French armed forces fighting against the Viet Minh. It was not a fully sovereign country. It had limited self-rule within the French Commonwealth.

Cambodia was a little bit more independent. It was a protectorate of France and the French were responsible for defense and foreign relations, and the Cambodians were responsible for internal administration but always under the direction of a French prefect. The same was pretty much true of Laos, also.

Q: What was the attitude of the staff of the American embassy iSaigon towards the French at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: I'm trying to think back now to this. We were really walking a bit of a tightrope there. On the one hand we were trying to maintain a cordial relationship with the French and persuade them that it was our intention to support their defense of Vietnam against communist aggression. At the same time I think we were growing more and more aware of the importance of nationalism as an element in the political situation in Vietnam, and we were trying to cultivate some good will I suppose with the Vietnamese. That's about as closely as I can characterize it at the time.

Q: I was just wondering whether it was one of these things where we were sort of thinking of the French as not really doing things very well and we could do it better and all of that?



CUNNINGHAM: Well there was a certain amount of that, certainly, so far as the prosecution of the war was concerned, and a lot of criticism of the French conduct of the military campaign, particularly that they were conducting it as a colonial war rather than as a war for the sovereign integrity of Vietnam as a sovereign country entitled to self-rule. We thought they ought to give the Vietnamese a little more latitude.

Q: What about the events leading up to and including the end of that at Dien Bien Phu, which really started at the beginning of 1954? What was our reaction to that?

CUNNINGHAM: As I recall, the Americans were just as much taken by surprise by the way Dien Bien Phu turned out as the French were. I don't recall that there was that much skepticism on the part of the Americans, particularly the military advisors there. I could be mistaken on this but I don't recall that the Americans were advising the French not to concentrate their forces in Dien Bien Phu. It was quite evident by the time that the French elected this strategy, that the French war against the Viet Minh was not succeeding and that the Viet Minh were gradually gaining, and gaining, and gaining. Something had to be done. The French elected to concentrate a very large force at Dien Bien Phu. I don't think that the Americans advised them against it, that is not my impression.

Of course for a time the French concentrated forces up there and everything seemed to be going well. At first they were not being brought under attack. What no one expected was that the Viet Minh would be able to lug, and actually would lug, artillery over the mountainous terrain and set it up on the perimeter around the valley. I do recall at the time somebody sayinI think it was one of the military groups therthat the French didn't think they needed to take the high ground. Of course now they were being finished off like fish in a barrel.

Q: What about social life there? Were the Vietnamese included in the social life or was it pretty much with the French?

CUNNINGHAM: A lot of it was with the French and what social life there was involving the Vietnamese I think was to some extent... There were some people in the embassy now who worked very hard at cultivating the Vietnamese. What you have to understand is we had no Vietnamese language officers in the embassy at that time. All conversation with the Vietnamese was conducted in French. Therefore you had contact only with Vietnamese who spoke English or French. If you had contact with a Vietnamese who spoke neither English nor French, it was via an interpreter and it was English to French to Vietnamese most typically. There were very few people who could interpret between English and Vietnamese. A few of my Vietnamese staff in the embassy, for example, spoke English but there were only two whom I relied upon to serve as interpreters to Vietnamese contractors, vendors, and so forth, who I dealt with in the general services office.



Q: Was there any concern about penetration of our embassy by the Viet Minh?

CUNNINGHAM: Not that I recall, no. We did not feel particularly vulnerable in that respect. The French were the ones who were the objects of antagonism for the Vietnamese and I don't recall that we necessarily felt vulnerable to the Viet Minh.

Q: Was there any concern as Dien Bien Phu was really going through its last agony that we might intervene? I know the French were trying to get us to intervene and it was being considered back in Washington. I was wondering what the attitude was in Vietnam?

CUNNINGHAM: I think the attitude in Saigon at that point was that it was hopeless. Dien Bien Phu was gone. It was over with. It was finished. You see one thing that happened was, during the period of Dien Bien Phu I remember very clearly one morning while the final battles were going on over there we were all awakened by a huge explosion about 4:00 in the morning. The Viet Minh sappers had gotten through the perimeter and blown up the P.O.L. dump, which was out in one part of town. Then about a half-hour to 45 minutes later there was another huge explosion. This one was closer in, and it was the French army's ammo dump.

So here at a time when the French army was fighting for its life in Dien Bien Phu the sappers had blown up the P.O.L. supply and blown up the ammo dump in Saigon. That convinced everybody in the establishment, I think, that it was over with. If the French could not protect their main stronghold in South Vietnam at a time when their army was under attack and fighting for its life in the north, they were not going to be able to hold onto Vietnam; that was the end of it. Of course the negotiations at this time were beginning to pick up in Geneva, so the handwriting on the wall was very clear. Everybody knew that it was over at that point.

Those two explosions by the way broke windows in the ambassador's residence and I had to get busy the next morning. As a matter of fact what made McClintock pick me out a few weeks later to be his Administrative Officer in Phnom Penh was that I got the windows in his residence fixed very quickly. That's how I got my job in Cambodia. It was truly an extraordinary opportunity. I was an FSS-11 or maybe an FSS-10 at the time. I had a minor supervisory position. I had no training in fiscal or personnel management, which are major responsibilities of an administrative officer. I did like managing things and getting difficult jobs done. And I was still single, mobile, young, and adventurous.

Q: Such are Foreign Service careers made.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right.



Q: Coming back to Phnom Penh...

CUNNINGHAM: There are a couple of more things that I would like to say about Saigon before we leave it, and again it is sort of a personal reflection on it. Once the Geneva accords were agreed to, 90 days was allowed for people to evacuate from the north to the south, and of course the French also were given 90 days to get their troops out. There were three things that I remember very clearly about this period. One was the speed with which the French pulled out. They pulled out so fast that we actually began to protest that they were leaving too quickly and they were going to cause the collapse of Vietnam particularly by departing so quickly. I think all the French troops were out within 60 days rather than 90. They were not interested in staying any longer at all.

The second thing is the arrival of Ngo Dinh Diem. I remember very clearly the day that he arrived; it was in early July of 1954. It was the first time in my life that I saw spontaneous demonstrations in the streets of Saigon or almost anywhere. There weren't a lot of people that came out but people did come out and I remember that there was sort of a spontaneity and optimism about his arrival and the welcome that he was given at that time.

The third thing that I remember is the evacuation of refugees from North Vietnam. There was a huge stream of them. There was an airlift almost constantly from North Vietnam into Ton Son Nhut airport. I was out at the airport frequently on other business and every time I went out there, there were transport planes of all descriptions, one after another, landing and discharging North Vietnamese refugees. This was a major airlift, with planes of all descriptions landing one after the other. Again I remember these people coming off of those planes and having a dazed look about them. These were people who had been uprooted from their ancestral villages where their families had lived for generations and they were brought into a strange land. Their dress was different. Their language was different. They didn't know where they were. It was really a very moving and pathetic sight.

Not only that, I remember very well the transport ships. American military transports were finally pressed into service to help evacuate North Vietnamese from North Vietnam to South Vietnam within the 90-day period, and they were jammed. Those ships were pulling up in the Saigon River right across the street from the Majestic Hotel at the foot of Rue Catinat, or Tu Do as it was later called, and there were people all over the decks; they were burdened with people. A lot of them were people who were not allowed to leave their villages and go to the evacuation ports. They had actually launched themselves into the sea on whatever kind of craft, or even just a floating piece of wood that they could get, to get out into the shipping lanes and be picked up by ships that were coming south.



There were several hundred thousands who evacuated in that period to South Vietnam. That left a very deep impression on me. Within five years I had seen people fleeing tyranny in three different countries, in two different parts of the world, and those are indelible memories that I just can't forget. I think they have to be part of the record nowadays. Those of us who remember have to let others know what the experiences were like. Anyway, that's pretty much it for Saigon.

Q: You were in Cambodia from 1954 until when?

CUNNINGHAM: I think I left on the 14th of July 1955.

Q: What was Cambodia like?

CUNNINGHAM: We used to call it the poor man's Bangkok. I liked Cambodia very much in those days. It was a very peaceful country, peaceful people. There was a certain amount of guerilla activity going on up in the northwest but for the most part the rest of the country was very peaceful. It was very poor. Cambodian people are very generous and kind people, likeable people. They were then trying to recapture their sense of identity after about 70 years as a French protectorate. An International Control Commission was set up to monitor the truce in Cambodia. It was composed of military personnel from Canada, India, and Poland. The commanders of each national detachment lived in the Hotel Royale, the principal hotel in the city and the social center for the international and French colonial community there. Dinner hour in the Hotel Royale dining room suddenly became very cosmopolitan, with the staff of each of the three contingents seated at separate tables. Each had a retinue of diplomatic officers. Everyone was busy watching everyone else and warily making contact.

Of course Phnom Penh at that point changed from the very sleepy little capital of a minor kingdom into a rather, not really cosmopolitan place, but there was sort of a bustle of diplomatic activity. A lot of the French who had done business in Saigon moved up to Phnom Penh and transferred their offices up there, so that brought a lot of people in. It brought some money in and shot up the price of housing. Of course the Americans contributed to that, too.

As I say there were five official Americans in Phnom Penh on the first of July 1954. By the time I left one year later there were 90. We had a full-fledged embassy, USIS, AID mission, and a military advisory group there. I had to find office space, housing, and English speaking local Cambodian employees for practically all of them. That was a real adventure.

Q: How did Robert McClintock run his embassy?



CUNNINGHAM: Robert McClintock was a groupie. He liked to have people around him. He also had a certain dash and flair. He made a habit of dictating all of his telegrams in final form. He was very insistent upon having a secretary that could take good dictation and he would never redraft a telegram. He would have a diplomatic conversation someplace, and he would come back to the office and call his secretary in. He wouldn't have made any notes, and he would dictate a cable report to the Department on the spot and sign what he had dictated. He made that known; he was very proud of that and that's the way he wanted his drafting officers to work. He was a pretty decisive guy. He was approachable. He was not a high posture man although he was a strong, decisive leader. I always felt that I could go into him and say, "Mr. Ambassador this is a problem and this is what I think we ought to do." He'd say, "Okay, if you think so, you do it. Of course you realize that you are responsible for making sure it's the right recommendation and that it works out if you do that." He was not bureaucratic. He was decisive and quick. He had a quick temper, but that was balanced by a good sense of humor. I was never aware that he carried even the slightest grudge against anyone. In general he was well liked by his staff. In the year that I was there I didn't hear any carping or criticism of him as you often hear of senior ambassadors in other places. He also watched out for the staff. It was his first ambassadorship.

Q: Did he have his poodles with him?

CUNNINGHAM: No, I think he had Seamus, a big Irish setter, with him at that time. He liked to talk about his experiences in Lebanon. I guess Lebanon came after that.

Q: Lebanon came later.

CUNNINGHAM: His wife was Chilean. He had a good sense of humor. He liked to tell a joke. He enjoyed a good glass of champagne. He had the habit also of ending his telegrams with some kind of a fillip. For example, the only example that I can recall, but it is typical, is one in which he said he had gone to see the French resident general, or whatever the top French official was at this time with Cambodia being a fully independent country, and he talked with him about this and so forth. In typical fashion, McClintock came back to the Embassy promptly and dictated his reporting telegram. The closing line of the telegram was, "and by the time we concluded our conversation the champagne was warm."

Q: What was the attitude that you gathered from the rest of the embassy towards Sihanouk?



CUNNINGHAM: They were suspicious of him. They found him temperamental, which he certainly was, and difficult to get along with. They were bothered by the influence of the queen mother, who was playing some kind of a political role at this time, had over Sihanouk. Of course you have to understand that I was not a political officer at this point. I was a politically interested administrative officer and an aspiring Foreign Service officer, but I had no responsibility for political analysis. My impressions of things up to this point are of that category. I didn't have access to the diplomatic traffic that was going on, and so on. I did have instincts and feelings about politics in general and in respect to Asia in particular. These instincts had been formed by years of personal interest, reading, and university education, as a summer reporter and as a witness to political life in New Mexico. I was impressed by Sihanouk, and I still am. He is an extremely clever man.

Q: I think he is still going.

CUNNINGHAM: He is a political survivor. He is still going and everybody else is gone. Sihanouk's goal was to gain full independence for his country. That should have been what we wanted also because it was the best guarantee against communist subversion, but he wanted to do it his way, and we wanted him to do it a different way. That's the best that I can characterize what I understood and gathered of the relationship with him at the time. We were frequently at loggerheads with Sihanouk or with his agents. As a result of that, we did not have good access to the Cambodian political establishment, whatever it was.

The best example of this is when John Foster Dulles made his swing through Southeast Asia in the spring of 1955 to set up the SEATO organization. The treaty was concluded at a conference in Manila. Dulles visited Saigon, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh en route to Manila. Phnom Penh was the last stop before he went on to Manila. He went to the palace and had lunch with the king at that time, and I know very well because I had to host his secretary and a couple other members of the party to lunch at my house and that was very enjoyable. Off he flew, either that afternoon or the next morning, to Manila. Ambassador McClintock went with him to attend this conference in Manila.



A day or two later at noontime during the siesta period there used to be siestas when everything was shut down in Indochina in those days from noon to three. Sihanouk broadcast his message of abdication. The embassy was absolutely dumbstruck by this. Not only did we not know it was coming, we found out about it because one of the Embassy's Cambodian chauffeurs happened to be listening to the radio that afternoon. He did not speak very good English and he did not speak French at all, so there was a great deal of hustling around the embassy that afternoon to try to find out exactly what it was the Sihanouk had said on the radio about leaving office and what the implications were. The poor chauffeur was being interrogated right and left through intermediaries who were trying to establish this communication. Eventually somebody got over to the foreign Ministry or wherever, and got an official statement. A frantic telegram went off to Manila report to the secretary of State, who had just seen the king two days previously, that he had abdicated.

No one knew what this abdication meant. I said, "Well it is obvious. He can't play a political role if he is on the throne, and he wants to play a political role. He is not out of politics by any means." I don't think that was the interpretation that the initial reports from the embassy put on it at the time. I could be mistaken but my impression is that there was some other exotic rationale or reasoning that went into it. It seemed to me to be pretty obvious what Sihanouk was trying to do.

Q: He became known as Prince Sihanouk which I guess he still is known as.

CUNNINGHAM: Now he is king again. The situation has now changed enough that he can play a role and grant amnesty to various people, which he has done. I always felt that many of our problems in Cambodia came about because we couldn't get on the good side of Sihanouk and I think it all originated from that early period in 1954 when we couldn't persuade him to do things our way.

Q: Yes, and then later he got very annoyed about too much of a CIA presence. I mean we came into all sorts of things and he just didn't trust us, and with reason.

CUNNINGHAM: Sihanouk is a real activist. He is somebody like Lyndon Johnson in a manner of speaking. He was going to be his own man. He was going to run things. He was in charge of his country and he felt competent to do so. He wanted to have command and he didn't want a bunch of other people telling him how to do it. He wanted their cooperation and their help. Anyway, so be it. There it is.

Q: You left there in July 1955?



CUNNINGHAM: Yes. There are two other things that I ought to tell you about so far as setting this embassy up is concerned. One is that I did manage to get that building completed in the middle of April and to get everybody in. The week after we moved in the real heat wave arrived. I made my deadline to get people under air conditioning by the time the monsoons began, and I count that as a great success. It was a real job to do it.

The last problem was with the electrical company, which was still run by a French company at that time. I believe it was private, but very likely had a preferential status under the old, and by then defunct, colonial system. As I recall the situation, the electrical companies, by then at least, in each of the three former states of the Indochina union (now four with North Vietnam) was independent of the others, but all were owned by a holding company based in France.

At the embassy, we wanted to have a backup generator in the embassy for emergency power. It had to be connected in a particular way to the municipal grid, still operated by the French company, so that the generator would kick on automatically as soon as the electricity from municipal grid was interrupted. The local manager, a very rigid colonial type, was not willing to allow us to install the automatic device between the municipal grid and the backup generator. We had the emergency generator in place. We had all the wiring in place, all the switching, all the circuitry. Everything was there except the link to the power grid of the French electrical company. The local manager would not give us permission to make that connection, and we couldn't make the electrical system operational until he did. It was April. I knew the hot season was almost upon us. The old Masonic Temple would become unbearably hot any day. The new Chancery Building was in every other respect ready for us to move in. But I could not move anyone until I could assure reliable emergency power. Were I to do so, it would represent a capitulation to the manager of the power company whom I had all along been telling that the connection was absolutely essential a non-negotiable requirement.

I made all kinds of demarches to the manager. He was unyielding. Meantime, the weather was getting warmer, and back at the temporary chancery in the Masonic Lodge, the Embassy staff was getting uncomfortable and restive. I had put myself between the rock and the hard place.



Finally I got word that the general manager from Paris was going to be in town so I requested an appointment with him and I went to see him. I went to see him and it was interesting. He spoke excellent English. (The local manager did not.) I explained the problem to him and he turned to the manager and asked him in French "what's going on here?" The local manager went into his routine about the incompatibility of our installation and the municipal grid and the technical impossibility of allowing the connection we requested. The general manager said, "That's nonsense." He then turned to me and said, "Mr. Cunningham, that will be taken care of. Go back and tell the ambassador it is all set. We are very grateful for what you Americans have been doing in this part of the world and we will always support you here. There is no technical problem; no reason why this shouldn't be done." I immediately went back to Ambassador McClintock and said, "You've got to send this guy a thank you note." He came through for us. That was a very good event for me.

The other major problem was getting English speaking Cambodian employees. There weren't any Cambodians in Phnom Penh who spoke English at that time. They had been under French occupation and acculturation for 70 years, and many spoke excellent French. We had to have English speaking local employees. Finally somebody said to me, "You know, during the war the two western provinces of Cambodia were ceded to the Thai and the Thai occupied them. When the war ended these provinces were returned to Cambodia. A lot of the Cambodians who were living there moved to Bangkok. English is the lingua franca of Thailand. There is a community of Cambodians living in Bangkok, and maybe now that the French are out some of them would be willing to come back." I don't know who it was that told me this; it may have been the CIA guy in Phnom Penh. He said, "Maybe you could recruit some of them. You go to Bangkok and see Jim Thompson who knows these people."

Q: This was the silk guy.

CUNNINGHAM: The old Jim Thompson from the Original Thai Silk Company. The legendary OSS operative who later disappeared mysteriously in Malaysia at Cameron Highlands. I got orders, went to Bangkok, and looked up Thompson at his Thai Silk shop one afternoon. I explained the situation to him and he said, "Okay, I'll help you. Come to my house tomorrow afternoon, at such and such a time", and he gave me the address. I went and I saw Jim Thompson's beautiful house in Bangkok, on a klong, filled with all kinds of magnificent oriental furniture and art. It was a virtual museum, and I've not seen the likes of it since. Thompson had there a leader of the Cambodian community in Bangkok who spoke very good English. I brought someone from the American embassy in Bangkok with me because if this were worked out we would have to have some kind of processing to go through this hiring arrangement. I explained the situation to the man Thompson had invited to meet me, and I had a long conversation with him. He said, "All right. I'll find people for you." I told him that this representative of the embassy in Bangkok was the person whom should be contacted; I've forgotten now who that officer was.



I went away and within a month somewhere on the order of ten to 12 English speaking Cambodian employees who were recruited in Bangkok had moved to Phnom Penh to join the staff of our embassy. It was very rough for them reintegrating into the community. Some of them were Sino-Cambodians I believe and it was a big change of lifestyle, living standards, and all the rest, but that worked out. Many times since everything collapsed in 1975 and Pol Pot came to power, I have wondered how many, some 20 years later, still were there and what suffering they might have endured. They did come to Cambodia of their own free will, but I was the agent of their decision.

Q: '74 wasn't it?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, '74. There was a period of course in between when we had no relations with Cambodia at all. I wonder how life turned out for those people, but anyhow you can't foresee all of these things. They took a chance. I just hope that they were dealt with fairly by the American government and taken care of because they did make a sacrifice to be there. I never retained any contact, with them, but my conscience won't let me forget them. They worked for the Embassy loyally, as did the Czech staff we were forced to let go in Prague in 1950. All are part of the family to whom our country is indebted, but who are mostly unknown to our people. May God give them all peace and rest.

Q: You left there in July '55.

CUNNINGHAM: I left there in July of '55. By this time my French was pretty good. I had been taking the Foreign Service exam all this time and I was passing the language portion of it, but not the other part because I was too long out of college.

Q: Yes, away from academia.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, away from academia and doing other work, and so on. I went back to Washington and I was assigned to the old FE/EX, the executive office of the bureau, the administrative backup.

Q: For the Far East?



CUNNINGHAM: Yes, for the old Far East as we called it, the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, now the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. I worked there in some administrative capacity backing up the general services people in the area of Southeast Asia of which I had been familiar. We had an office in the old temporary buildings along 23rd Street. I was living somewhere up on Meridian Hill in a rooming house and sort of pondering what my future was going to be. I was getting ready to take the Foreign Service exam again.

One night November about 11:00 P.M. I was sound asleep and the phone rang. I answered it and it was David Osborn who at that time was serving on the China desk. He said, "Bill?" I said, "Yes?" "How would you like to study Chinese?" I said, "David, I've always wanted to study Chinese. I've wanted to study Chinese for several years." I'd been putting that in on my preference report as the language I next wanted to learn. I had decided that when I was back in Hokkaido working for David in the early '50s. He said, "That's good because there was a meeting this afternoon to select the next class of Chinese language officers and I put your name in." That was the second class to be selected after the Foreign Service Institute reinstated its field language school and its own internal Chinese language program. Up until that time they had been sending people to universities to take Chinese language training. One class had gone through in 1955, and I was to be in the class of 1956. I said, "That's great." I hung up and went back to sleep.

The next morning I woke up and I thought, did I dream something? I called up Osborn and said, "Did you call me last night and tell me I was going to be studying Chinese?" He said, "Yes, I did. Have you changed your mind?" I said, "No, no, no, absolutely not. I definitely want to do it."

There is a little aphorism in Chinese about the great Taoist scholar, Zhuang Ci. Zhuang Ci falls asleep and has a dream that he's a butterfly. He is a beautiful butterfly and he flies all about, samples all the flowers, and so forth. It was an extremely realistic dream. Then he wakes up and from then on Zhuang Ci, the teacher, says I do not know whether I am a butterfly dreaming that I am Zhuang Ci or whether I am Zhuang Ci who dreamt that he was a butterfly. That was sort of the way that I feel about this conversation that I had with Osborn that late night.

Q: Tell me, you had not taken the...



CUNNINGHAM: I had not taken the Foreign Service exam. It is a mystery to me how as a staff officer, at that time I was an FSS-9, I was selected for Chinese language training. There were six of us in the class. There were four of us Foreign Service people, Dick Donald, Dick Nethercut, Jim Rousseau, and myself, plus Fred Fisher who was a USIA Foreign Service officer, and Bill Rhoads who I think was a CIA officer. I was Foreign Service staff. I must have taken the Foreign Service examination that fall but I don't think I had the results yet; this becomes important for the following year. In any case I began Chinese language training in January of 1956 as a Foreign Service staff officer, class nine. It was, I reckon, the influence of David Osborn who had become a mentor of mine by that time and whose work I very much admired and respected, that I got into that line of work and got that opportunity. I started studying Chinese and I did sort of all right.

That December something else very important happened. I attended a Christmas party late in December here in Washington that was given by three young women who were working at VOA at that time. A friend of mine who had been with me in Korea and Cambodia, Donald Riley in USIS, was invited and he said, "Why don't you come along?" I said, "I don't feel like it." He said, "Oh, come on, you'll enjoy it." So I went.

It was up in an apartment house on Connecticut Avenue. There was a very attractive young lady at that party whom I wanted to meet, and I did get to meet. Her name was Patricia Sloan. She was on home leave from Florence where she was the assistant cultural officer. She had been staying with some people who worked at VOA where she had been employed before going overseas with USIS, and who were also invited to this party so she came along with them. We met at that party. I engaged her in conversation and invited her out to dinner afterwards. To make a long story short, we were married the following July, and we still are. She's here with me this week in Washington and we are going to our granddaughter's eighth grade graduation tonight.

Anyway, I went into Chinese language training in January of 1956 very deeply in love with Patricia Sloan, studying this hard language, distracted by this, and I was up for the oral boards in April of 1956. I had passed both the language and the written portion of the examination by that point and I think by then it had been reduced from a three-day to a one-day operation. I came up for the oral boards in April of that year and they started asking me all kinds of questions about American history, economics, economic analysis and so on. I wasn't prepared and I failed.



It was the worst experience of my life. Here I was, I had met the girl of my dreams, I was going to get married the following July, and I was in Chinese language training which is something I had always wanted to do. I had been in the Foreign Service seven years. I liked it and I wanted to continue in it and I failed this. I was absolutely crushed. I didn't know what I was going to do. I must say my wife, at that time my fiancée, could have said to me at that point, "Sorry, where you are is not where I hope to be." She could have gotten out of it at that point but she was very loyal and she did not desert me. She encouraged me.

After about a week of hearing me moaning and moping around she said, "You've got to get your act together. You've got to do this thing and do what it takes to get through." I went to see Max Krebs, the Executive Director of the Board of Examiners at that point, who was I guess on the Board of Examiners. He said to me, "Bill, we've got to have Foreign Service officers who know American history, who understand our economic system. If they are going to represent us abroad they are going to have to know those things, and you didn't do well. Everybody thought it was going to be a very easy interview so we are just as disappointed as you are. It's up to you. You've got to correct it." I said, "What do I do?" He said, "Night school. Take a course in economics at American University or GW." I said, "But I'm getting married in July." He said, "If you want to be a Foreign Service officer, you've got to do it. There are some books you should read, too. Henry Steele Commager."

Q: American Civilization I think.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, right. "So get to work." I went back to FSI and told Howard Sollenberger what had happened and what I would have to do. I got Commager's book. I found a night course in macroeconomics at American U. We completed our wedding plans. The other five who were in the language course were sent on to Taiwan in June. There would only be six months training and that would be the end of it. Another class was not to begin until the following January. I was kept in FSI and there I think I am grateful to Howard Sollenberger who saw some potential. Howard even arranged for my fiancée, later my bride, to have some limited Chinese instruction during her lunch hour. She worked in the old Walker Johnson Building on New York Avenue. The FSI in those days was located in the three little apartment buildings at the corner of 21st and C Streets, NW.

I was doing all right in the language by that time. I was doing all right in the language by that time. As a matter of fact I was one of the best students in the class. Maybe not the best but they liked my work and they saw potential. They saw that I could make it. Sollenberger arranged for me to continue to study one-on-one with a Chinese tutor there in FSI while I got my status worked out.



At this time also the Wristonization program was going on and somebody said it me, "Apply for Wristonization. You are eligible." I thought I would really like to be a thorough Foreign Service officer and do it the way everybody else has, but I'll do that to have a holding spot. I put in my application for Wristonization. I got married.

I came up for the oral board for the Wriston exercise in about September of 1956. By this time I was married, I had completed the summer night course at GW, I continued my Chinese language studies, and I had been reading American history. They put me through an oral examination the likes of which I had never had before or since. It seems to me there was a board of three or four of them, and it was over in the old Walker Johnson Building, a Marine Corps building at one point in its history, on New York Avenue where USIA was headquartered. By the time that interview was over, my head was spinning. I felt like I had been put through the third degree. I think even the lighting effects in the room were almost like that. It went on, and on, and on. It felt like it was three hours that I was in there, and they asked me everything.

Q: Do you recall some of the questions?

CUNNINGHAM: They asked me about American history, the economy, and the acquisition of the Florida territory. I guess they asked me about what I had been doing in the Foreign Service, my career experiences in Asia, and all sorts of other things. I guess they were testing my powers of analysis as well as my general knowledge. It was rigorous and by the time I got out of there, I had the worst headache I ever had and I almost didn't care whether I passed or failed because I was so washed out by the experience.

Then I heard nothing. Weeks went by and I continued to study Chinese. We were settling into our marriage and going through all that adjustment. My wife continued to work at USIA in the exhibits division. We worried about this thing and finally come November, I still hadn't heard anything so I went to see Randolph Kidder who was in some position in the Department at that point. I had known Kidder in Indochina. He had been in Saigon as first political counselor, and then as DCM when McClintock was sent to Cambodia.



Kidder was in some part of this Wristonization process so I said to him, "Here is my situation. This has been dragging on. I don't know what is going to happen. I don't know where my career is going but whichever it is, either in or out, I would just as soon know as soon as possible. If it's out, I have to make other plans. I am resigned to that if necessary." He said, "Well this is supposed to be a merit process and it is not supposed to be subject to any kind of personal intervention." I said, "Can you find out what's going on and what the time line is on this thing?" He said, "Well, let me see." About a week later on a Saturday morning I received a phone call at home. He was calling me from home and he said, "This conversation is not supposed to take place but don't worry about your status; you will be Okay." And that is all he would tell me, so I said, okay, and I thanked him. That was typical of Kidder. He was considerate of the staff people, the younger ones who were coming up. I don't mean that he was an easy mark, or that he held us to a lesser standard. But he did look out for his people, as any good leader or supervisor should.

A few weeks later I received transfer orders to go to the language school in Taiwan and join my class. I was still a Foreign Service Staff then; that had not changed. After I arrived in Taiwan in January of 1957 and reported in to language school, official word finally came through that my appointment as a Foreign Service officer had been approved. Then I had to have the oath administered so that my pay status could be changed. Nicholas Bodman, the Director of the Language School, apparently was not authorized to administer the oath. Paul Popple, with whom I had served in Saigon and who had been a good friend there, was the senior officer among the language students, so I asked that he be designated to administer the oath, which he did between classes on a gloomy, chilly January morning in the little front office of the language school. The surroundings were, if anything, less pretentious than those in which Marvin Will had first administered the oath to me in that old temporary building in September 1949. There was no ceremony. I went back to class right afterwards. It was very much in contrast to my first commissioning ceremony in the Navy at Albuquerque ten and a half years previously. After almost seven and a half years and many attempts, I was finally a Foreign Service Officer.

I also - and this is very important to me - during this interlude I took the Foreign Service written examination one more time. It came along again in December and was administered at Georgetown University. I took the exam because I didn't know how this process was going to turn out. Even if it turned out okay I still wanted to say I passed the Foreign Service examination all the way through. I took the written exam then only a one-day affair in December 1956, and I did pass it. By then it was not necessary to have a language qualification to be appointed an FSO, but I had met the qualification in French and was training in Chinese, I had been through a rigorous oral board, and through a written examination, which I passed at least three times. I figured that I had covered all the bases, at least to my satisfaction. I had made the record that I was qualified to be a Foreign Service officer.



Q: You were where in Taiwan?

CUNNINGHAM: Taichung.

Q: You were there from '57 to when?

CUNNINGHAM: I was there from January of 1957 until the end of July 1958. The language training program at that time was somewhat longer than it is now. In those days we took six months initially in the U.S. and two more years at the field school in Taichung.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about your impression in how the school worked then?

CUNNINGHAM: The headmaster was Nicholas Bodman who was a Ph.D. in linguistics from Cornell, as I recall. He was a specialist on languages of south China, but he also knew Mandarin. It was a very good program. Bodman was a very strict scholar. He was not a career Foreign Service officer. FSI hired scholars to run the school in those days. It was pretty rigorous training. I think the school operated well, and operated effectively.

We used standard texts that were produced by Yale University, and there were more materials that were produced by the faculty there. The teachers were all young Chinese who were university graduates for the most part or were university people in the sense that they had university education though they may not have been able to complete it. They were all from north China because that was the approved standard for the Chinese language, the official language.

We attended class in groups of three and four for four hours a day, and these were usually in the verbal language. Later on we also had some courses in learning to read Chinese characters; we had been studying that in Washington as well. I guess we all had a command of somewhere on the order of 300-500 characters by the time that I got to Taiwan. I was able to catch up with my class relatively quickly. I was a little bit stronger on some points, and a little bit weaker on others. They were there and of course they had more exposure to the spoken language than I had in Washington. I had a little bit more exposure to the written language than they had by that point, but I was not out of sync with them. We had two hours of one-on-one tutorials. We also were expected to do about four hours of homework every evening.

We were also expected to do some reading on the area, on China. There were certain books that were recommended but there was no standard requirement, which I think, was probably a mistake. There should have been certain core books that we all had to read. We were given a choice among a wide array of books to read. There weren't so many books on China in those days. The literature is vast, enormous now, by comparison.



We had speakers come in. Bodman used to arrange for speakers to come in, people from the embassy to brief us from time to time, or other travelers from Washington who might be coming through, or people from Hong Kong, and sometimes local people would come in. I don't recall that any of those were in Chinese. Occasionally we would have a field trip, about three or four a year, to go out and visit villages or some locality and get exposed a little bit to Chinese life and institutions.

It was a very enjoyable experience. We were not part of the embassy. We were not a functioning diplomatic post. We were a school and we didn't have responsibilities that took us away from our studies. It was a comfortable and enjoyable life.

Q: In all of this language training one of the big things is learning from your teachers about the culture and all of that. Were you getting any feel for the Nationalist, the KMT regime in Taiwan, and then what was happening in China itself?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. Well so far as the culture is concerned, the language text incorporated a lot of cultural material into it like behavior and how to conduct yourself in dealing with people. We did study political questions when we got more advanced. When we got to the point where we could read Chinese newspapers they became part of our daily text so we picked up a lot of contemporary political information from that, and we had periodic briefings at the embassy.

First of all it was illegal in Taiwan at that time for anyone to be in possession of anything that was printed or published on the mainland. One of the big questions was how were we going to learn simplified characters and the literary style of mainland publications if we couldn't study them? The school by the time that I arrived there had worked out an arrangement with the local authorities that made it all right for our instructors to use People's Daily in the school as a textual material but it could not leave the premises.



The teachers for the most part were pretty interested in what was published in People's Daily and they weren't necessarily accepting of it. They all had their own bitter experiences at the hands of the communists, but they hadn't always had good experiences at the hands of the Nationalists and they had their reservations and objections. These were intellectuals, well informed people, well educated people, so they had their criticisms of the KMT and its policies particularly in China, but also some of the things that it was doing in Taiwan. That didn't mean that they were pro-Communist, but they credited some of the critiques of the communists with being accurate and on point when it came to the Nationalists. In class you could get them to talk a little bit about this, some more than others, but everybody was very cautious about it. Not only that, there were some among the faculty who were considered to be pro-KMT, though not necessarily agents of the regime. That meant that some faculty would not discuss certain matters in the presence of other faculty and it had to be understood among us that we should not attribute things, certain comments, to certain members of the faculty when talking with other members of the faculty. You had to be somewhat circumspect. This was kind of a constant undertone in the school.

I remember one time later on when I became the Director of the Language School, Yeh Kung-chao (aka George Yeh), who had been foreign minister and then was the ROC ambassador to Washington, was home on a visit and he came to the school. We were showing him around. Edgar Snow had recently been to Beijing and had interviewed Chou En-lai.

Q: He had been a left wing correspondent in Britain.

CUNNINGHAM: No, Snow was an American citizen, a native, I believe of Kansas City. He was the author of Red Star Over China and others. He had been a correspondent in China for the Saturday Evening Post in the 1930s and had very close ties to the PRC regime and the Chinese communists, dating from the days that he had known them as revolutionaries. He was a well-known authority on conditions in China at that time but with a particular point of view. In any case, he was considered a leftist in American circles as well as in international circles.

Anyway, Snow, on one of his visits to mainland China, had a long interview with Chou En-lai, which had been published in Life magazine. One of our jobs at the Language School was to train interpreters for the Warsaw talks, which were going on at that time. This is a later period in 1961 to 1962 but it is germane to the point we were discussing. At that point I was Director of the language school so I instructed the two teachers, who were preparing our interpreters, to take this article and to translate it into Chinese in order to get the flavor of how the PRC would discuss relations with America and the kind of line they would take, so the teachers had done that. They then developed a simulated dialogue between Snow and Chou that would be used in the special interpreter training course that we were developing.



I was taking George Yeh around the school, and we came to the classroom where this text they was in use. I explained to Yeh what was going on. This caused a pall in the classroom for a moment there and then Yeh said something like, "That's very interesting. You can certainly get their line in that way." He was a sophisticated enough man to understand what we were doing. But his hesitation, and the hint of discomfort in his expression, was emblematic of the constant undertone of tension in the school about issues involving U.S.- PRC relations.

Q: When you were sitting around having a beer with your fellow students and all, what was the feeling at that point about eventual relations and all with communist China and all?

CUNNINGHAM: We expected in those days that they would come about fairly soon. As I say, I was in the second group to go into language training. The FSI was taking in roughly six officers a year into language training on the assumption that relations with the PRC would be reestablished soon one way or another, and I'll come back to that in a minute. We had 14 or 15 consulates in China prior to the Communist take over and all of us in training assumed all of these posts were going to be reopened so the U.S. would need a lot of Chinese language officers. We thought there was a sky-is-the-limit sort of opportunity for us.

This was 1956-1957. The Korean War had ended in an armistice in '53. The war in Vietnam had ended in an armistice in 1954. The Warsaw talks had begun soon after that in 1956 or 1957, and they were regarded as an avenue towards the resumption of relations with the PRC. The thought was that we were moving closer to this.

It was very clear by then that the United States was not going to back an invasion of the mainland by Chiang Kai-shek. That was not fully accepted by the Nationalist Chinese establishment at that time. It did not become fully accepted until after the Quemoy bombardment in 1958. There was also a feeling that the Nationalist regime on Taiwan was not really fully established; it was kind of in a precarious situation and it might not last, and Taiwan might very well be absorbed into the PRC in some fashion. It is not that the United States was supporting that by any means, in fact quite the contrary, but no one in the mid 1950s expected that the Republic of China would still be around in the 1990s. You couldn't get anybody to take a bet on that at all. Taiwan in those days was an agrarian economy with a very limited industrial base. The standard of living was very low. It was a poor area. People did have enough to eat and they had reasonably good housing, shelter and clothing, but this was a backward area. No one in those days had the vision of what Taiwan has become today.



We were preparing in the expectation that within our careers we would be serving in the People's Republic of China. It was not until two things occurred, principally the great leap forward and the hard-line campaigns that began to come out in the PRC at that time, and the escalation of hostilities in Vietnam and this was after we were out of training and into regular diplomatic work that it became pretty clear that it was going to be a long time until any relationship with China was restored. In those days we sort of expected that we were going to be serving someplace in China in our careers and that it would be within a few years.

Q: I take it that as far as the officers were concerned who were taking this, there was sort of - maybe it is wrong to characterize it - a certain distance between the new Chinese language officers who were coming out and the Nationalist government. Yes here it is but this is not necessarily something that you want to embrace whole-heartedly.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, that is a very good point. Most people finishing their language training had wanted to be assigned to Hong Kong, or one of the other watching posts that we had.

Q: Burma, Indonesia.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, something like that. It was not the first desire or preference of anybody in the embassy at that time to be assigned to the American embassy in Taipei. The Chinese language officers in the embassy in Taipei when I arrived in Taichung had gotten their Chinese earlier on. Bill Gleysteen, the consul general, was one of them. He may have taken a little bit in this program but that was just brush-up. I think Bill Thomas might have been there in the economic section but I'm not sure of that. Paul Miller, Sandy Peaslee, Carl Nelson, there were very few people in the embassy in Taipei who were products of the Foreign Service Institute's Chinese language program at that time.

By the time that I finished I wanted to go to the embassy in Taipei. The reason that I wanted to go there was that I felt the opportunity to further improve the language would be greater there than it would be in going to Hong Kong, which was the major other alternate preference of most of the people. Most of the other people in the class wanted to be assigned to Hong Kong because then they would be getting into PRC affairs. They would be watching China, and they would further improve their knowledge of what was going on in the PRC. The main interest on the part of the group was in the PRC; it was not in the Nationalists, not in Taiwan. They weren't interested in that situation.

Q: When you got out in July of '58, what happened?



CUNNINGHAM: I was sent to the American embassy in Taipei and put in charge of press translations in the embassy there. Once again, I was serving under David Osborn, my mentor from my assignment in Hokkaido eight years previously. Osborn was the Political Counselor, and I was Second Secretary of Embassy. I was also to be responsible for reporting on domestic politics in Taiwan. Ten days after I arrived, the bombardment of Quemoy broke out. By this time Everett Drumright had been assigned to Taipei as the American ambassador. The American embassy had been attacked by a mob the previous year and sacked. Karl Rankin, who had been chargé d'affaires for a long time, had been named ambassador, left in some disgrace as a result of this, and Drumright was brought in.

Drumright's influence was very important in that embassy in two or three ways. First of all, he was regarded as a strong supporter of the Nationalists and he had had that identity all the way through his career. I think there were two other important contributions that Drumright made to the operations of the embassy. One of them was that as soon as he got there he said, "I want as many Chinese language officers in the embassy as we can possibly have." He wanted every substantive position filled by a Chinese language officer. There were six at the time that I reported in August of 1958. As I recall, they were David Osborn, the Political Counselor (he knew Chinese well, but was not as fluent in it as in Japanese) the First Secretary in the Political Section Alexander C. (Sandy) Peaslee, Carl Nelson, Norman Getsinger in the Commercial Section, and two others, whom I do not now recall. By the time I left there were 13. Drumright was absolutely right about having the number of language officers he demanded. It made a significant difference in the way that the Embassy worked, in the conversations that went on among us, in the way that we worked among ourselves, in the way that we exchanged views and perceptions of issues and personalities in Taiwan, and in our perceptions of what was happening in China. By the time Drumright had been there a couple of years it became commonplace for us to work in terms of the Chinese language in discussing what was going on in Taiwan. The communication among us, and the way in which our analyses developed, were very much improved as a result of that. So was our rapport with the Chinese community, with the government, with officialdom, and everybody else with whom we worked. All of that was much stronger as a result of Drumright's emphasis on language capability. He set a high standard in that regard.



He did another thing that strengthened our relations with the government and the Chinese community. There were frequent automobile accidents in Taiwan involving usually American official vehicles, but sometimes vehicles driven by private Americans, where somebody would get injured. It was a very crowded city. The traffic situation was very bad in Taiwan at that time. There was a lot of mixed traffic with ox carts, bicycles, cyclopedes, trucks, and automobiles. There was very little regulation. People would get injured. They would be hospitalized. There would immediately be an outcry against the Americans that somebody had been irresponsible. They were very sensitive about this. The viewpoint of the Chinese was, you have this enormously powerful machine at your command and you should be able to make it behave. You have so much power you should be able to control that power and not allow accidents to happen. In Chinese mentality the accident is always the fault of the more powerful figure. It is not the result of your conduct; it is the result of who has the greater power advantage.

This was a very sore point in our relationship with the Chinese community there. Soon after Drumright arrived he said, "We are going to do two things. First of all whenever somebody is injured by an American vehicle of any type, an official vehicle of any kind or anybody in the American official family driving, we are going to immediately visit that person in the hospital and offer condolences. This is not an admission of guilt, we are just going to say we are sorry that this happened and show our compassion in that way. Second, we are going to make an ex-gratia payment. That is to say it is sort of like noblesse oblige in our system. It doesn't represent admission of guilt or responsibility, but it recognizes that someone has been injured and that we want to show our compassion in that way."

He arranged for a fund to be set up which was financed by liquor sales through the commissary so that there was in effect a kind of surcharge that came off of this. That went into a fund, which was then used for the purpose of these ex-gratia payments. It was a set-aside, you might say.

He became known for that and often times when such incidents did take place the newspapers would publish a picture of the representative of the ambassador and whatever organization it was that was involved in the accident, calling on the person in the hospital, presenting flowers, and making an expression of condolences. I think in a few instances Drumright made some of those visits himself. That did a great deal to promote good relations with the community as a whole in Taiwan. I think Drumright deserves a lot of credit for all of that.

These were things that Drumright instituted because he realized that the Chinese should not perceive us as a kind of imperial authority or colonial authority. He felt that some of the things that had gone on prior to that had given that perception.

Q: Extraterritorial privileges.



CUNNINGHAM: Yes, the extraterritorial privileges and all of that. He wanted to erase that kind of stigma, or at least blemish, or at least counteract that to the extent that he could. He was very insistent on that kind of an approach toward the Chinese.

Q: Was this also to diffuse the riot that had sacked the embassy?

CUNNINGHAM: Oh yes, definitely.

Q: Could you explain how that came about and if it had any reflection down at the school?

CUNNINGHAM: This is pretty sketchy because I was not involved in this; I was at the language school at the time. What happened was that one evening an American sergeant who was in the provost marshal's office in the American military advisory group in Taipei, shot and killed a Chinese whom he accused of being a peeping tom who had been peeping in the window at the sergeant's wife in their quarters. He went out, shot this man, and killed him. It turned out that the man who was shot was a member of the intelligence service of the Taiwan Garrison Command, the supreme military authority at that time, which was under the direction of Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of the President, Chiang Kai-shek. The Nationalists had declared martial law when they moved their capital to Taipei in December 1950. Their rationale was that China, including Taiwan, was in a state of civil war, warranting suspension of civil rights.

The sergeant was subjected to a court martial by a U.S. military court in Taipei. There was a great outcry that he should have been tried in a Chinese civil court, but under the UROC status of forces agreement that could be done only if the U.S. waived jurisdiction. The U.S. would not waive jurisdiction and therefore this man would be tried in an American military court and subjected to a court martial. He was not convicted of homicide. The trial was witnessed of course by members of the man's family and others. There was a very strong feeling in the Chinese community that he was guilty and should be convicted of homicide.

As soon as the verdict had been handed down U.S. military aircraft evacuated the sergeant from Taiwan immediately, I think within hours of the verdict. That effectively removed him from any possibility of being subjected to a judicial process under the Chinese system. There was resentment about this and the next day a crowd gathered outside of the American embassy compound protesting this action as unjust on the part of the United States and accusing the Americans of all kinds of bad deeds.



The protest was very interesting because it was about six months after we arrived in Taiwan and the students at the language school were scheduled to make a field trip to Hong Kong. We had all traveled to Taipei and had been in hotels the night before when all this build up was going on. I think it was the night of the day the trial took place and the sergeant was evacuated from Taiwan. There were an awful lot of people in the streets the following morning as we were going to the airport to get on the plane.

In order to make the field trip, I had driven up to Taipei with my wife in my 1956 Plymouth Coupe purchased through the American Foreign Service Association's diplomatic purchasing program. We had arranged with a chauffeur from the American embassy to drive us in my car to the airport so we could board the plane, then he was going to drive it back to the embassy and put it in the compound for safe keeping. Well he did. He got it back to the compound, and drove it in the gates about 15 minutes before the mob came over the wall. It was safely inside the American compound. It got beat up a little bit in the ensuing disturbances but it was not burned or basically damaged. I did receive damages from the Nationalist government and bought a replacement automobile as a result of that.

Anyway, the mob came over the wall and they sacked the American embassy, in effect. They didn't burn it but they smashed it up very badly. The thing that was particularly symbolic was that the ambassador's limousine was parked in the port-cochère. The car was moved out, turned upside down, and a three-way combination safe was pushed out of an upstairs window and dropped onto the overturned ambassador's limousine. I think this was a definite symbolic act on the part of the people who had taken over the embassy. Embassy order was restored and the people were evicted from the compound. Americans have always been told that hooligans committed this sort of thing.

Of course by this time all of us from the language school were in Hong Kong, and the next morning we were reading in the newspapers that the American embassy in Taipei had been sacked immediately after our departure. Everybody in the consulate general wanted to know what in the world was going on, and what this signified for the relationship between the United States and the Republic of China, and the PRC as well. That is sort of a thumbnail sketch of the story.

Q: What was the general belief? That this was done with the tolerance of the Nationalist government?



CUNNINGHAM: Yes, the general belief was that nothing like that would happen in Taiwan unless the government was willing to allow it to take place. Now the government may not have intended that it go as far as it did. They might have intended for it to be a protest demonstration that would not get out of hand. It may have gotten out of hand and gone somewhat farther than they intended. You have to understand that emotions were running very high over this. This man who had been murdered had been a member of the intelligence service and there were a lot of people who felt strongly about his death and about the way the whole affair had been conducted. As to the merits of the case and as to whether the sergeant should have been convicted or not, I can't really comment because I don't have a clear enough recollection of it.

Q: Just one question before we finish this language school time. Were there any sort of half-life lingering problems about being a China hand from the McCarthy times by the time you came in or was that pretty well over?

CUNNINGHAM: I think there still are, frankly, in a manner of speaking. Everybody in my time who specialized in Chinese was conscious of what happened to those people. I don't think very many of us knew them personally though some of us had the opportunity to get to know some of them later on. I think that there was the unspoken feeling that there was a line that you had to be very careful about, particularly in the 1950s, in dealing with Chinese affairs, in dealing with the PRC.

I remember very well that this was the period of the so-called three Walters: Walter Robertson, the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs in the Eisenhower Administration; Walter McConaughy, the Director of Chinese Affairs after Edwin Martin, and Walter Judd, former American medical missionary in China, a close friend of the Chiang family, and then U.S. Representative from Minnesota in the Congress. All three of them had very strong views about the People's Republic of China, the Chinese communists, so one wrote and analyzed in consciousness of what their attitude was. That doesn't necessarily mean that you slanted the reports, but what I think it means is that if you are going to recommend a particular line of action or a particular policy, you had to work very hard to have the documentation, the support, and the argument for it lined up. Drumright was regarded as being sympathetic or congenial toward, or receptive to, compatible with, the thinking typified by the "Three Walters". We felt that probably the United States did not challenge or question the basis of ROC policy and the kind of line the ROC wanted us to take.

Q: ROC being?

CUNNINGHAM: The Republic of China, the Chinese Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek. They didn't want to challenge that as objectively as we might have, had this whole period been absent from the relationship.



Q: There was a very strong China lobby too, particularly in Congress with Senator Noland of California, Walter Judd of Minnesota, and others. Walter Judd was from a missionary background.

CUNNINGHAM: Medical missionary, yes. I met Walter Judd in Saigon during the time that I was there. Walter Judd knows China and knows the Chinese people, there is no question about that, but he had a particular point of view. I guess that is it; we were conscious of the point of view in doing our work and in doing our reporting and analysis. You mentioned the China lobby. The China lobby was very strong, very influential. You had to reckon with it also. That is to say you had to be conscious of the atmosphere in which your reports and analyses were going to be read in Washington and that in the background were the lingering influences of the 1940s China lobby. In fact also in the background was the continuing influence of the successor to the 1940s China lobby, and that China lobby still operates today. In fact we've got at least two China lobbies that are operating in the United States, not as an organized entity, but as a body of opinion. That has an influence upon the thinking, or at least attempts to influence the thinking, of the United States government and the American people with regard to China.

Q: I might just add a footnote. In a way it is similar to the one other one, which would be dealing with Israel. It is the same sort of understanding about the atmosphere in which you are dealing, a highly political, a highly charged atmosphere that one has to understand.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right, politically charged, and sensitive, anyou have to be conscious of that, absolutely.

Q: It only is interesting in developments later on, was there much contact between the embassy during this time that you were with the embassy in Taiwan, and the Taiwanese?



CUNNINGHAM: I was the first Taiwanese language officer in the embassy. The last four months that I was in Taichung in the language school, I asked to spend half my time studying Taiwanese because I knew by then what job I would be going into. The last month that I was there I lived in Lu Kang, one of the first villages settled by people coming across from the mainland in the 17th century. The Taiwanese that was spoken was considered as the authentic version of the language. My Taiwanese was never as good as my Mandarin. I continued my Taiwanese studies in the embassy and had a tutor, as a matter of fact. I got to know many of the leading Taiwanese opposition figures very well. I was the only embassy officer that ever was in contact with some of them. These were senior people who had also fought Japanese rule in some instances, though not all were in that category. But they were all united in their opposition to the undemocratic rule of the ROC in Taiwan. Again that was the sort of thing my KMT Chinese contacts often questioned me about, this work that I was doing. At one point I had to be somewhat circumspect about this because the intelligence services of the KMT were constantly feeding stuff back to the embassy saying, "Cunningham was seeing certain people and we wonder what is going on? Does this represent a decision by the United States to support the Taiwan independence movement, Thomas Liao and other people overseas who were Taiwanese Nationalists?"

Yes, that was a sensitive area but it is to Drumright's credit that he did not tell me to not have contact with these people. I think that Osborn, who on an earlier tour to Taiwan developed some of these contacts and was conscious of their views, felt that it was important to know these people and to at least allow them to be in contact with the U.S. government and feel that they were getting their point of view across. I think that he persuaded Drumright to allow that, but at the same time the word would come back to me that this kind of report had been coming into the embassy and that they were wondering what was up and maybe I should back off a little bit for a while.

As an example, there was one time when Lindsey Grant, an economic officer in the embassy and a Chinese language officer for whom I worked later on, and a couple of other fellows from the embassy and I, took a cross-island hike on what was known as the power line trail; it followed the Taiwan Power Company's east-west transmission line across the island. The mountains are very high. You got up to 10,000 feet. Lindsey is a great hiker and so he said, "We've been talking about doing this," so we finally took the power line trail hike across the island.

After this hike when we got back, the report got back to the embassy that Cunningham had been up in the mountains and he had been talking to people up there so he must also know how to speak mountain languages. Mountain languages are the aboriginal languages of the Melanesian people who had migrated to Taiwan even before the Chinese had arrived in the 15th century. It was that kind of fantastic thing that was coming back to them. I was regarded as a questionable character in that respect by the KMT authorities.



Q: Just to finish up this part, and then we will wrap this up for this session, you started in '58 going to our embassy in Taipei?

CUNNINGHAM: I was assigned to the embassy in August of 1958. I was put in charge of press translations. My job was to produce a consolidated press translation comparable to the summary of the China mainland press produced by the Consulate General in Hong Kong in those days. I did that and I ran it for about three years. In 1961 I was sent back to Taichung as Director of the Language School. That came about because the then Director, Howard Levy, who also knew Japanese, was transferred by the Foreign Service Institute on an emergency basis to Yokohama to take over FSI's Japanese language school there. There was a sudden, unexpected vacancy there. I went for one year as Director of the language school to fill in until FSI could get a professional scholar to come out and run it.

Q: We'll pick it up the next time at that point. What are some other subjects that we might pick up next time about Taipei?

CUNNINGHAM: One of them is the change or the affirmation of the policies of the KMT with regard to return to the mainland in the wake of the Quemoy bombardment. Also Secretary Dulles' visit in the fall of 1958, including what happened at the state dinner for Dulles. That was one of his last overseas trips by the way. We should also cover the China Democratic Party and its rise and what happened in opposition politics during those three years when I was covering that. The establishment of what was involved in setting up the daily press translation service in the American embassy from 1958-59. The visits of Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, both of which occurred during this period of time. One of them happened after I had gone to Taichung and I came back to work on it. Those were some of the things that I can think of now. Also, the whole business of Taiwan's economy taking off during this period and the decisions in regard to the economic development of Taiwan during that period, and the encouragement of a consumer economy in Taiwan by the U.S. government and USAID.

\*\*\*

Q: Today is the 22nd of March 1999. This interview is taking place in Houston Texas. Bill, before we move on to the taking over of the Chinese training in 1961, you had some remarks you wanted to make prior to that about things that had happened.

CUNNINGHAM: If I can remember them in order. The first was the affirmation of the return to the mainland policy of Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT in the wake of the Quemoy bombardment. I think I may have said previously that I arrived at the American embassy in Taipei on transfer from Taichung, which is only 100 miles away, about ten days before the outbreak of the bombardment of Quemoy on August 24, 1958. The date sticks in my mind; it is unforgettable.



The bombardment of Quemoy caused great alarm at the time particularly because it was not clear whether the PRC was attempting to reduce the fortress of Quemoy preparatory to conducting an amphibious operation against the islands, particularly against Quemoy, which is right in the mouth of the harbor of Amoy and effectively blockades it. It is only about a mile and a half offshore. That whole question of whether an actual invasion was going to take place; the issue of whether or not under the treaty of mutual defense that the United States had with the Republic of China on Taiwan at the time, was applicable to Quemoy or not; and the obligations of the United States to its ally, the Republic of China, under those circumstances; all of those things were very much at issue.

Of course it is important for people to understand historically that every incident that occurred in the Cold War, particularly any incident involving the use of armed force, was automatically regarded as a litmus test of the reliability of the United States as a supporter of its allies all around the world in all of these mutual defense treaties that we had concluded from Europe to Japan and Korea by that time. What we did in the Taiwan Straits inevitably would be looked upon by every other ally of the United States as a test of the reliability of the United States under any kind of armed attack. Nowadays in 1999, the eve of the 21st century, it is very hard for people to understand the atmosphere of that time, so it is important to put that in context.

Q: What was our analysis at the time out of our embassy on Taiwan about what was the intention of the People's Republic of China?

CUNNINGHAM: Actually what we were concentrating on more was what would the Republic of China do in response to it? It was this kind of situation where in the technical sense, in terms of international relations, the legitimacy of the Republic of China was under attack by the PRC. The position of the Republic of China's government, Chiang Kai-shek's government, the Nationalists at that time, was that China was in a state of uncompleted civil war and the PRC regime in the legal sense, in the juridical sense, was a rebel rump organization that was attempting to overthrow the legally established constitutional government of the Republic of China. Therefore the Republic of China had the obligation in defense of its national sovereignty and constitutionality to suppress this rebellion. That was the official position. So long as there were no on-going hostilities between the two sides that was simply a formal position without an actual policy of implementation, you might say.



Not only that, the U.S. Seventh Fleet was "patrolling" the Taiwan Strait. Initially it had been sent there to prevent the outbreak of hostilities initiated by either side back at the time of the Korean War. The situation had changed by 1958. By 1958 the treaty of mutual defense between the United States and Taiwan had replaced the earlier order to the Seventh Fleet of President Truman. In effect the Seventh Fleet was acting more as an ally in defense of Taiwan's territorial integrity and immunity from attack than it was as a buffer. Its mission was no longer as it had been at the outset to prevent the Nationalists from initiating an attack on the mainland so much as it was to protect Taiwan from an attack by the PRC against Taiwan.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: The ambassador at that time was Everett Drumright. Drumright had arrived the previous May having previously been consul general in Hong Kong.

Q: An old China hand.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, an old China hand from the 1930s, trained in the language school in Beijing. Interestingly enough Drumright was in China at the embassy in Chungking during the Second World War in the 1940s when Clarence Gauss was the ambassador there and when John Stewart Service, John Carter Vincent, John Paton Davies, Jr., and all of the other famous China hands were serving there. During part of that time the Dixie mission was sent from Chungking to Yen-an. It included John Stewart Service and I think Raymond Ludden and David "the dog" Barrett the military attaché, a very colorful guy, and I think John Carter Vincent though I'm not sure. During this same period they were in Yen-an, the wartime headquarters of the Communist Chinese Party, in the winter of 1944-45, Drumright was in Sian at the U.S. Consulate there, perhaps as principal officer. Sian is not far from Yen-an; both are in Shaanxi province.

In fact many years later - - in 1980 - - when I visited Sian I happened to go to a restaurant for dinner with a senior Communist Party provincial official, and he said, "This is the restaurant that Chou En-lai used to like to come to when he wanted to get out of Yen-an and come down to town."

But Sian at that time was under Nationalist control. It was the Nationalist outpost for watching what was going on in the communist headquarters in Yen-an less than 100 miles away. Drumright's formation in Chinese affairs during the winter of 1944-45 while the Dixie mission was in Yen-an was very much under the influence of the Nationalists. So it was the Chungking and Sian experiences and relationships developed at that time, as well as the policy positions in the late 1940s with which Drumright, then in the Department, was associated that made him very much a welcomed figure when he arrived in 1958 in Taipei from Hong Kong.



Q: During this '58 to '60 period, were the expectations that the Nationalists would try to do anything, launch any attack, or was that pretty well over?

CUNNINGHAM: That was the key question in August of 1958 when the attack began. There were people in the leadership of the Kuomintang who saw this attack upon Quemoy as a military provocation that would justify military action by the Nationalists against the China mainland. In other words, here was an opportunity that would provide them the political cover necessary to actually implement the campaign for recovery of the mainland that the Generalissimo said was his obligation and constitutional mission. In the embassy in Taipei at the time, we were very much concerned as to whether the Nationalists were really going to try to do this.

One of the first things that happened was additional units of the U.S. military were moved to Taiwan soon after the attack began. We beefed up our units there from about 10,000 men to about 13,000. We moved some combat air force units from Clark Air Force Base into air bases on Taiwan. That was intended as a warning to the communists, the PRC, not to try to attack Taiwan.

There is something that is very important to understand here historically. The treaty of mutual defense concluded in 1953 between the United States and Taiwan covered only Taiwan and the Pescadores. The Pescadores are about one-third the way across the Taiwan Strait to the mainland, and juridically are part of Taiwan. China had ceded them to Japan in 1895 along with Taiwan itself. The mutual defense treaty did not cover the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Those were the responsibility of the Nationalists and the Republic of China.

The other interesting thing about it is that under the doctrine of the United States at the time the juridical status of Taiwan and the Pescadores were "undetermined." This came from John Foster Dulles, the great international lawyer. There was absolutely no question about the juridical status of the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu; they are juridically Chinese territory and everybody recognizes that. They are not part of the province of Taiwan. Quemoy and Matsu are part of the provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang on the mainland. The treaty of mutual defense did not cover Quemoy and Matsu. Militarily they were the responsibility of the Republic of China.

Also, if the PRC were to take those two islands militarily, in a symbolic sense they would have removed from territory that, as part of the mainland provinces, was indisputably Chinese. That would not of itself have destroyed the Nationalist, or ROC, government, but would have left it in control only of territory which both claimed, but which had not been retroceded to either Beijing or Taipei by the San Francisco and related Peace treaties. In a conceptual sense separate status for Taiwan, including the Pescadores, would have gained some moral legitimacy. You can see how that line of argument could have developed. This kind of symbolic issue was part of the mix at the time.



Our job in the American embassy was on the one hand to shape the response of the Republic of China, the Nationalists, in such a way as to discourage any attack upon Taiwan itself by the PRC. In other words we did not want to get into a situation where we would come into armed conflict with the Chinese. That was the first thing. The second thing is that in encouraging the Republic of China, or dissuading the Republic of China from doing anything that would involve us with direct combat with the PRC, we also wanted to leave the responsibility for the defense, for actually military combat, with the PRC entirely in their hands. But we didn't want them to use the military action as a pretext for committing themselves to a military campaign against the mainland. It was all very complicated and very delicate.

Q: How about at your level, and other officers at your level, were you trying to make this point or were you leaving this to the ambassador?

CUNNINGHAM: We were following it very closely. We had a very small political section. There were four officers there. David Osborn, now deceased, was the counselor for political affairs, and Sandy Peaslee, also now deceased, was his principal deputy. A man by the name of Carl Nelson, who is still living in Florida, was the third officer, and I was the junior officer. Dealings with the ROC leadership all was being carried out by the ambassador, the DCM at the time who I think was Joseph Yager, and David Osborn. They were the people who were dealing with the top levels of the ROC, and I should make it clear here that Ambassador Drumright, despite his antipathy toward the PRC and his sympathy for the ROC, was loyal to U.S. policy and carried it out effectively. Most of us in the Political Section were following the popular reaction to this. I was very new on the scene. I was really trying to get my bearings at this point trying to figure out what was going on.

The main point right here is that in October 1958 things got very tense. This bombardment went on and on. At one point the Republic of China was accusing the United States of disloyalty to its allies. As long as the bombardment went on the question came up, how was this garrison on Quemoy going to be sustained? These guys had to be resupplied. Artillery was being fired off at a great rate. The PRC was attempting to blockade the island of Quemoy by bombardment. How were supplies going to get out there?

What it really came down to eventually after a lot of back and forth between Washington and Taipei, and also between the embassy and the Nationalist government, the ROC government, was the ROC's responsibility to resupply Quemoy. The ROC's response to this was, what the hell kind of an ally are you? Here our soldiers are in danger out there on the front lines and you are not going to help with the resupply? You are not going to help send in ammunition? We said, "Well, that is the other side of the Strait and it is not covered by the Treaty." This really helped to define the application of the Treaty very clearly.



What finally happened was that it was decided that the vessels of the Seventh Fleet - I think it was probably one destroyer escort - would convoy the resupply vessels of the ROC navy from Taiwan up to a certain line in the Strait of Taiwan. From there on they had to make the run for the beach, basically, on their own with whatever protection they were able to provide.

Then the question came up, where do we draw the line? Is it the territorial seas? Well all right, the U.S. decided to draw the line at the territorial sea limit. We could convoy these vessels so long as they were in international waters but the demarcation point then came to be the territorial sea limit. Well, whose territorial sea limit?; according to what interpretation? At the time the U.S. interpretation was three miles. Three miles from where? Three miles from the beach line at Quemoy, or three miles from the beach line over on the other side of the strait on the mainland? If we got that far over it was certain that any U.S. vessels would come under fire from shore batteries on the mainland. We didn't want to get involved in this thing so we didn't want to go that far. There was some talk at that time about the six mile limit and I think the U.S. was pushing this as a compromise to the proposal for a twelve mile limit advocated by some countries at the time as an international standard, but that hadn't really been recognized yet. Even then, again it was the same thing, six miles from where?

I think at this point this dispute became public and Beijing came up on this, the New China News Agency, and pointed out that so far as they were concerned the territorial sea limit was 12 miles. Well again it was 12 miles from where? Could it be the beach line at Quemoy or could it be the beach line on the mainland. In retrospect, and perhaps at the time, I think this PRC announcement was intended as a signal to the U.S. that Beijing did not want to have a military encounter with the U.S. Setting the twelve mile limit from the point on the most extreme seaward point of Quemoy at low tide would, if respected by the U.S., put American navy vessels at just about the extreme range of PRC shore batteries, if not beyond their range.

Frankly I can't remember how all of that sorted itself out, but at any rate at the time that it was finally sorted out, U.S. vessels did actually escort the re-supply vessels from Taiwan out into the Taiwan Strait and they stopped at a certain point. I do not remember now how that point was defined but in any case it was very carefully calibrated to take into account all of these conflicting interpretations and it was done in such a way that it did not commit the U.S. to recognize any particular territorial sea limit. In other words it was a political decision and it was made pretty clear. I'm pretty sure that by this point the PRC understood that we weren't going to put ourselves in any situation that would compel their shore batteries to take our vessels under fire. We avoided it in that way. We fuzzed it up in that true American diplomatic sense.



The second thing is that while all this was going on there was a contest for control of the air over the Taiwan Strait. We supplied the Republic of China air force with sidewinder missiles, which they used to great effect. I think the kill rate was something like 30-to-one in the air battles over the Taiwan Strait. That meant then that very early in the battles it was not possible for the PRC air force to attack any re-supply lines from the air. I think that helped us in our negotiations with the ROC to determine this political demarcation point in the waters of the Taiwan Strait. It was very complicated business.

The media in Taiwan was controlled so they would release statements by "political" figures, leading military strategists and so forth, in the press there intended to psychologically coerce us into adopting the position most favorable to them. It was not always the one that our military wanted to adopt. The military did not want to get into a fight with the PRC at this point.

Drumright's job was very delicate. On the one hand he was recently arrived, he had very good credentials with the ROC, they liked him. He was on good terms with the Gimo. They thought he was okay. He was reliable. He wasn't one of the China crowd in the State Department that was trying to sell out the Gimo. He didn't have that identity at all. In order to maintain his access to them he had to retain that image with them.

On the other hand he had to utilize it to cool off the hot heads, most particularly a fellow by the name of Tiger Wang who was the commander of the ROC air force at that point and was a real gung ho sort of a person. He talked publicly as though he was ready to order his forces to go across the Strait and lay PRC military installations waste. He seemed to figure that they could. Of course when the ROC air force got the sidewinder air-to-air defense missile, which proved extremely effective in dogfights with the PRC air force, that made them feel even more invincible. Drumright had to sort of cool off that element within the ROC military establishment; I think there were a lot of generals who wanted to gain favor with the Gimo (Chiang Kai-shek) and avenge the defeat they had experienced on the mainland ten years earlier.

It is very difficult for a soldier. Your comrades are under attack and you want to protect them; you want to show that you are tough and strong and you're militant and all the rest. On the other hand I think there were some cool heads among the ROC military who realized that this could be a pretty sticky operation if they really got into ground combat with the PRC. They weren't itching for it but on the other hand they had to look like they were really going to make a big scrap out of it if it really took place.



For a period from the beginning of the artillery battle in August until October when John Foster Dulles came out on his trip in 1958. Dulles was ill with terminal cancer at the time. He had either just been to Rome for the funeral of Pius XII or he was going there after his stop in Taiwan. Three months later he resigned and Christian Herter became secretary of State. Dulles was a sick man and he came out at a crucial point when this whole matter of the outcome of the battle was undecided; that is the political outcome, the military outcome. Would it be extended to the mainland? Would we get involved? By this time we had units of the Fifth Air Force, combat units, on Taiwan. We had beefed our military up by about 3,000 people. In effect we were saying to the PRC, if you are going to make a fight out of this we are ready to go.

Dulles came out for these negotiations with the Generalissimo. I remember this period very, very well indeed. I do not know the content of his conversations with the Generalissimo but they were very intense, and of course the Nationalists greatly trusted Dulles. The fact that he made the trip, it seems that it was necessary for him to go and say to them, on the one hand we are not going to abandon you, but on the other hand you must understand that we are not looking for a new opportunity to enter into combat with the PRC. We understand that you have to protect the position that you have adopted and we are not trying to in any way diminish that or detract from it but we are not going to back you up militarily if you carry this fight to the PRC on the mainland. That was the implicit message, I believe, Dulles came out to convey. He left and the issue was still in doubt. No one really knew whether the Generalissimo had taken this on board and was going to go along with it, or not.

At that point, I believe it was after Dulles had left, the Generalissimo called in the AP correspondent in Taipei, a man by the name of Spencer Moosa. Moosa was a man of uncertain nationality who had been covering China for the AP for a very long time, including on the mainland. Some people say he was Lebanese. Some people say he was Russian. He had a wife who had another nationality and all. He was one of these strange people who floated around in the atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s China.

Moosa was a seasoned and responsible journalist, and he had the trust of Chiang Kai-shek. When the Gimo had something that he wanted to get across indirectly, he would do it through Moosa. We had learned to watch Moosa's reporting very carefully. Most of the time it was pretty mundane and there was not much in it, but every once in a while there was an important story. Moosa would be the reporter to cover it, and of course we would interview Moosa to get a fuller background on this sort of thing. As I remember Moosa was not particularly forthcoming. He would dissimulate very skillfully under those circumstances in part to protect his access to the ROC.



At any rate after Dulles left the Gimo called Moosa in for an interview that was put out in question and answer format and this was very unusual. I think it was put out on the 20th of October 1958 if I'm not mistaken. It seems to me that's the date, right about then. I'm not sure whether Moosa actually saw the Gimo or whether he submitted questions in advance and then called on the Gimo and the Gimo said in response to question number one this is my answer, etc. It was quite lengthy. Ten to 15 questions were asked and responded to in question and answer format. It was put out by AP, the Central Daily News, and the Central News Agency of Taipei.

We had a big debate within the political section over this interview as to what it meant. I was in on it. Carl Nelson was in on it. Sandy Peaslee was in on it. I don't know if Dave Osborn was in on it or not. We disputed it back and forth. The reason I remember this is that it came out on a Friday and in those days we were always doing the Weeka every Friday.

Q: That's the weekly report, a round up of the week's news.

CUNNINGHAM: Everything. Political, economic, psychological, military, and so forth. We had a big debate over this. This came out just as we were preparing the week-up so we had to get out a report on it, and we also had to get it into the week-up. Because it came out on a Friday we had to get it right for that weekly report that had to go out every Friday afternoon. It had to be ready about 3:00 for all the top levels to sign off on.

We had this furious debate over it and I can't remember the particulars of it, but I'm going to take a little credit for it myself here as the junior officer of the embassy, newly arrived, less than three months on post by that time. Carl Nelson was on one side of the argument. Carl is a man I like very much, a wonderful man, and a good friend. Carl put a particular interpretation on the interview and I won't try to characterize it now because I don't remember it exactly. What I remember saying in this debate that we had in the political section was, "But Carl, if that was what Chiang Kai-shek meant, he would not have said this," and I pointed to a particular paragraph. It turned out that I had spotted the key phrase in the paragraph which maintained the Generalissimo's political position vis-à-vis the PRC, but he plainly wanted it to be inferred that no broader ROC military action was going to take place. That is to say that no attempt to extend military action from Taiwan on the offshore islands to the mainland was going to take place.



That interview is absolutely vital to understanding the outcome of the Taiwan Strait crisis. The interpretation that was sent in from the embassy was the interpretation based upon the sentence that I had identified. It amazes me still that all the officers in the political section, far more experienced than I, didn't see that, but I was the guy who saw it so I will take a little bit of credit for myself on that one. Soon after that took place and after this was made clear and became the prevailing interpretation within the diplomatic establishment, the gun battle began to taper off. In other words both sides got the message that nothing more was going to happen and eventually it came down to the alternate day shelling, propaganda shells, lengthening periods - such as holiday seasons - of suspended shelling, and all that kind of thing.

The other thing that happened, and it is very important to remember during this period of time, the deputy chief of mission was not Joseph Yager. The deputy chief of mission was a man by the name of Sterling Cottrell. Cottrell was a Latin Americanist. He had never been in Asia. I don't know how it was that he came in or how he was assigned but he arrived more or less simultaneously with Drumright. Cottrell was the kind of guy who liked to ingratiate himself with the embassy staff. He did all kinds of things that, now I realize as I've learned more about Latin America, were kind of in the Latin America macho style which really doesn't go over in East Asia, and it didn't go over with Drumright either.

At any rate, the last thing that happened before Dulles went home in October of 1958 was that the Generalissimo had him to dinner up at the residence. It was very formal. Of course the ambassador was there, Cottrell was there, the commander of the Taiwan defense command, and the head of the military advisory group were there. All of the top brass were there and I've forgotten who else. There were toasts exchanged. I guess first the Generalissimo as the host offered a toast. This was done in a very formal way and of course there was an interpreter, a prepared text, and all the rest. The secretary did not have a prepared text so he extemporized in response. The exchange was substantive. It related to what was going on at the time, and was very important. Drumright of course with all of his years of experience recognized this and recognized the importance of the nuances in this exchange.

After the dinner was over everybody came back to the embassy still in black tie. Drumright turned to Cottrell, his deputy and said, "Okay, write up the report of this exchange particularly the secretary's statement." Cottrell said, "I'll do the best I can from memory." Drumright turned to him and said, "You didn't take notes?" Cottrell said, "No, I didn't take notes." Drumright had just about had it with Cottrell by then. He was furious and said, "That means now that we have to rely on their version." (End tape)

There's another thing about my responsibilities in the embassy that I ought to cover. I had two responsibilities. The first was to set up the daily translation of the Chinese press.



In Hong Kong there was the daily translation of the China mainland press, the summary of the China mainland press, as it was known. It was a very distinguished operation, well established, and highly regarded. Drumright had been accustomed to that as consul general in Hong Kong. When he arrived in Taiwan he found that there was no comparable publication in the American embassy in Taipei.

There were at the time seven or eight daily newspapers. Six of them were morning papers and two of them were evening papers. They ran the gamut the Central Daily News, the official organ of the Kuomintang party, to an independent paper called the Ta Kung Pao, the great public newspaper, which was an opposition organ to the extent that one could have an opposition organ at the time. The other newspapers fell somewhere in between the two. Some were independently owned. Some were pro-government. One was an economic daily newspaper. Two of them were evening papers.

The Taiwan Defense Command, the Naval Auxiliary Communications Center, which was the CIA operation in Taiwan at the time, the American embassy, and the U.S. Information Service, each had a press translation operation and each was publishing its own summary of the Chinese press. Some were publishing them twice a week, some once a week, some three times a week, and so on. They were all independent publications. When the bombardment of Quemoy broke out in August of 1958 right after I had arrived, Drumright turned to me and he said, "I want a single daily summary of the Chinese press. You do it." My Chinese was reputed to be very good at that point. I said, "Yes sir." I sent out word to the supervisors of the translators of what the ambassador said, and then I called in these translators from all these different organizations.

The translators were all very highly educated Chinese. I believe they were all from the mainland. Many of them were graduates of foreign universities; St. John's in Shanghai and other Western-established universities. Some of them had advanced degrees. Their English was really superb in all cases. I told them first of all what the ambassador's wish was and they all said, "But our press translation is the best one so why don't you turn this over to us?" I said, "No, the ambassador wants this to be an embassy operation and he has directed me to take charge of it." You must understand that many of these people not only were highly educated but several of them were older than I, and a few were old enough to be my father. This was a very Chinese relationship. I said to them, "But this is what the ambassador wants and we have to cooperate with the ambassador." They were unhappy with this and they said, "We have to go talk to our chiefs," and I said, "Of course."

They went back and they talked to their chiefs. We were going to have another meeting in a day or two. In the meantime the ambassador was wondering where the hell was this consolidated daily translation of the Chinese press. I kept saying, "We're working on it. It takes a little while to get it organized."



One of the big problems was, were they all going to be concentrated in one location or not? If so, who was going to be the number one among them because there were four number ones here in this situation and somebody was going to lose face. It all took a great deal of negotiation. We hashed this thing around for a couple of weeks.

Finally the situation that we hit upon was that the embassy would produce the daily translation of the Chinese press. The Naval Auxiliary Communications Center had the superior publications facility so they would be the publishers of it, but the embassy would be responsible for editing the summary of the daily Chinese press. The translators would continue to identify articles that were important, intrinsically and particularly for the missions of their respective organizations. There would be a morning consultation by telephone among all the chief translators in these respective organizations and we would reach a consensus as to which articles were going to be translated, which group would do each, and then published. All the copy would be relayed to the Naval Auxiliary Communications Center by a certain time so that it could go into the publications operation that they had over there. That is the way we resolved it.

The other thing was that at one meeting with the translators I said, "Now I would like to conduct our meetings in Chinese." They all looked at me and said, "But our English is better than your Chinese." I said, "That's right it is, but I've worked very hard to learn Chinese and if I don't use it, it is not going to get better. It is going to deteriorate." They insisted that we should work in English because that would be more convenient for me. I said, "Well, if we work in Chinese it is more convenient for you." "Yes, but your Chinese is not up to our English." We discussed this back and forth also and we decided not to try to resolve it on the spot.

Eventually the resolution of that was that when it became convenient for us to work in Chinese, we would work in Chinese. When it became convenient for us to work in English, we would work in English. There was really no formal decision to go one way or the other but each of us would respect the sensitivities and wishes of the other parties. That was very good for me because then I was able to spend about 40 to 60 percent of my working day working in Chinese with the interpreters. If we had to go into English we would go into English in order to get the point across, but I would learn and they would learn. It became a mutual exchange, very professional. My Chinese benefited a great deal from it. And I believe that we all developed a close personal and professional relationship based on mutual respect. We produce an excellent publication, one that all the users regarded highly and of which the translators and I were proud. It was a first class operation and the Ambassador was pleased with it. Nearly all the complaints we ever got were when some breakdown made the summary late in reaching the reporting officers. Those instances were rare. We were proud of meeting our deadlines.



For three years I scanned every day eight Chinese newspapers selecting articles for translation, and we would put them through this system. It worked very well, in fact so well that by the time Vice President Johnson arrived almost three years after it went into operation, we were able to turn out this 30-page edition in which his aides found a potentially offensive article. I don't think it was offensive.

Q: You mentioned Bill about the visit of Eisenhower. This was the trip he made where things didn't go right in Japan and all. Could you talk about that?

CUNNINGHAM: That was October of 1960 and Eisenhower came. By that time things had improved a good deal in the overall China situation. That is to say the every other day bombardment of Quemoy was taking place; just a few shells a day. By that time they may have even been down to a point of firing propaganda shells only. In any case Americans were visiting Quemoy regularly and within any fear of danger. It was not exactly a tourist stop but a routine visit spot for visiting congressmen and people like that.

Economic conditions in Taiwan had also begun to improve by then, very, very modestly I must say because the standard of living was still quite low in 1960. Taiwan was beginning to develop export trade zones and there was beginning to be a little bit of improvement in the living standards of the middle class. People were kind of settling in.

It was also pretty much accepted by that time that while the government would continue to talk about recovering the mainland and eliminating the bandit regime in Beijing, it wasn't going to do anything militarily. While it would maintain a very strong military force, the military force would have a defensive configuration and not an offensive configuration.

At that time we were also having regular conversations in Warsaw with the PRC; the ambassadorial level private talks were taking place. The war in Vietnam had not really begun, had not really heated up at that time. There was no fighting in Korea; the DMZ was stabilized. In general there was an atmosphere of well-being and peace in most of Asia. The main issue at that time, which is somebody else's responsibility to talk about, was the revision of the security treaty with Japan which of course led to the failure of Eisenhower's visit there; it didn't take place.

Eisenhower arrived in Taiwan; it was to be his next to last stop before the planned visit to Japan. It had been programmed as part of the trip. It was very important. A sitting United States president had never before visited any government of China. The highest ranking sitting U.S. official ever to visit a government of China had been Henry Wallace who visited Chung-king in the 1940s while still Vice-President in Roosevelt's third administration. We might note parenthetically that Ulysses S. Grant visited China after leaving office, so he technically was the first U.S. President to visit China, though not a sitting President at the time.



Q: His round the world trip.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. Roosevelt sent Wallace out to find out what was going on out there and to try to keep the Nationalists in the war against the Japanese.

Eisenhower's trip was a very big deal. Of course Eisenhower was very well liked and respected in Taiwan. I am sure there were things of some substance that took place on that visit but it was largely symbolic. After all Eisenhower had less than a year to go in office and he was too prudent a man to make any long-range commitments for the United States.

The whole thing was an opportunity for the Republic of China to show itself off internationally. There was a big international and American press corps following Eisenhower. There was very heavy coverage. There were parades and there were rallies. It was all very friendly. And the weather was excellent for all the outdoor activities of the visit. Eisenhower laid a wreath at the tomb of the unknowns, or the war heroes in Taiwan. Someone remarked to me, one of our Chinese staff from the American embassy, said, "Well this is a great show. It is two old soldiers getting together and kind of carrying off the ceremonial functions in that manner."

Eisenhower helicoptered in from a cruiser - I think it was the Helena that he was traveling on at the time from off the East Coast of Taiwan. The Helena did not come up the Taiwan Straits. It stayed well clear of any provocation of the PRC. I think that looking back this was after all only two years after the bombardment across the Taiwan Straits so there were great pains taken to reassure the PRC that while this was a visit of solidarity, it was not meant as a provocation to the People's Republic of China. I don't remember anything in particular of substance in the case of that visit. It proved useful as a dress rehearsal for Lyndon Johnson's visit the following May when he came through Taiwan.

Q: How did that one go? By that time he was vice president.

CUNNINGHAM: By that time Johnson was vice president. He was sent out by Kennedy in April or May to find out what was going on in Vietnam because by '61 the situation was beginning to deteriorate somewhat there. Johnson came out and came to Taiwan. He did not go to Japan because the whole business of the failure of Eisenhower's visit was still too tender for him to risk that. He came to Taiwan. I think it was his first stop in Asia because then he went to the Philippines, Vietnam, and someplace else in Southeast Asia, probably Bangkok, which would have been a logical stop with Thailand being a SEATO ally at the time. I've forgotten what the rest of the itinerary was.



By the time that Johnson arrived, I had begun my duties as Director of the language school in Taichung. I had not moved my family to Taichung yet, and this was fortunate. Drumright called me back to Taipei to serve as Johnson's interpreter on the trip and also to coordinate special editions of the summary of translations of the daily Chinese press coverage of Johnson's visit. Because three years previously at the time of the Taiwan Strait crisis I had set up the daily translation of the local Chinese press at Drumright's direction I knew all these translators, the whole operation. I had run it for three years and this was kind of the final act. We ran an expanded version of some 30 pages or so.

This visit was quite unlike the Eisenhower's sedate, formal program. Johnson arrived in his campaign style, and he wanted to press the flesh with everybody. It was a very hot day. I was at the airport when he arrived.

One of the first things that happened involved the first edition of our special translation summary. The Johnson party, the Secret Service, took over the Grand Hotel, which was the only respectable hotel in town at the time, for the vice presidential party. Because Johnson arrived on somewhat short notice, that meant that the reservations of several other people, who had been booked into the hotel, had to be canceled. We were told to cover everything in the press summary, and every article that was related to Lyndon Johnson. Everything. Those were the orders that came down so I passed the word along to the translation staff. They loyally gathered up everything and they translated it.

Our initial edition of these translations, the arrival one you might say, we included a little article that some enterprising reporter from one of the six Chinese newspapers in Taipei had written concerning his interview with American visitors who were asked to vacate their rooms in the Grand Hotel for Lyndon Johnson. While they grumbled a little bit about it, one of them said this was highlighted in the story "Well after all he is the vice president and this is an important visit. I guess as American citizens it's inconvenient for us but we ought to give way for the vice president of the United States." This article appeared on the last page or the next to last page of this multi-page edition which came off the press just a couple of hours before Johnson was going to touch down. Before it was printed, the senior editor, Donald Wu, called the article to my attention and asked whether it should be included. In light of the orders we had received, I decided we should go with it. Donald, who was a veteran journalist, I suppose told the publications staff to bury the article in the back of the edition.



We rushed 30 or more copies of this edition out to the airport and somebody on the staff made sure that there was at least one copy in every vehicle in the presidential motorcade. Somebody on Johnson's staff looked through this translation edition and found this article on the next to last page. A howl went up and they said, "Oh my god, Lyndon will go through the roof if he sees this. Retrieve all of those. Get them out of there. Get them out of the vehicles." Somebody else had to run around and gather all these things up and get them out of the motorcade. I think despite this desperate precaution some newspaper guy who was in the traveling party got a hold of one copy and put the story on the international press wires so it was played back to the U.S. press.

At some point in the visit or before everybody who was accompanying Lyndon Johnson had finally left, one of the Johnson retinue went to see Joseph Yager, the deputy chief of mission at the time, and upbraided him for including this article in the press summary. "Why did you do this?" and so on. Joe Yager looked this thing over and he said, "After all it was published and it wasn't uncomplimentary to the vice president. I think we did the right thing by putting it in." The matter stopped right there. There was no further consequence after that. My career did not end at that point, thanks to Joe Yager, who was one of the best bosses I ever had.

As head of the translation section, the guy in charge of translation, there were three other things that happened. I was told to arrange for the translation into Chinese of the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup> to be issued at the end of Johnson's visit. Johnson was in Taiwan about 36 hours as I recall. The night before the day that he was to leave I went up to the Grand Hotel and started asking around, "Where is the text of the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup>?" I was told it was up there some place. I looked around, and looked around, and finally somebody said, "Well, Horace Busby, Johnson's speech writer, is up there and he's got it."

I went up and found Busby in his room at the Grand Hotel, which had been turned into kind of a workshop at that point with half a dozen people sitting around, going in and out. Busby was sitting there under a lamp with his typewriter, which was not electric as I recall, typing away at something. I said, "I'm here to get the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup>." He said, "It's not ready yet. You just wait." So I sat down and waited. This was about 9:00 at night. I waited while Busby was working on other things.

Finally he pulled out a piece of paper and came to me and said, "I'm working on this speech that the vice president is going to give tomorrow at 2:00 in the afternoon to the youth rally," or something like that, "why don't you look it over?" I looked it over. I read the speech and thought, I don't know how this is going to go down. I was supposed to interpret for the vice president at the speech too so I had to know this text. Lyndon Johnson, now that I've been to Texas and know more about his personal background, carried on at great length about how poor the people in Taiwan had been and how much better their life had become. He talked about "you didn't have this, and you didn't have that, and you didn't even have shoes!"



I thought this particular line, "you didn't even have shoes," was not going to wash to the audience that he's going to be talking to because the Chinese have got a thing about shoes and feet and so on, the whole bound foot syndrome. Lyndon Johnson was simply not attuned to the sensitivities of Chinese culture, so I just deleted that sentence from the text without saying anything. I just crossed it out so that it wouldn't get translated into Chinese. I think I gave it back to Busby but I'm not sure. I believe we handled the translation of that text into Chinese also, so perhaps I just sent it downtown to my staff. It did not appear in the text that the vice president used nor was it in the version published in the Chinese press, I know that.

The second thing that happened was along about 2:00 in the morning I was still sitting there wondering where this joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup> was. I kept calling my translators saying, "Don't let anybody go home because I haven't got it yet. Make sure somebody is there because I am going to bring it down. The deadline is very short and we are going to have to get it out, press lines and all the rest."

Bill Crockett who was undersecretary of State for administration at the time, or deputy undersecretary of State, a high-ranking official, had come in from the state dinner about ten thirty or eleven p.m. and had fallen asleep sitting in a chair, still in his dinner jacket, just about two seats from me in the room there. He had a piece of paper in his hand when he fell asleep. I didn't pay much attention to it. At 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, Busby got up from his typewriter, walked over, took the piece of paper out of Crockett's hand (Crockett was sound asleep and didn't know this had happened at all.), gave it to me and said, "Here is the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup>. I guess you had better go get it translated." I said, "Fine. Thanks very much," and off I went. Only much later did I realize that I had the only existing copy of the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup>. I have no idea how it got into the room or why it had been given to Crockett. He surely was not the appropriate member of the party to review it.

Downtown I went to where my translators were and I said, "Okay, here it is. Translate this thing and get it out. Let me know when it is finished and I'll get a copy of it and get it back to wherever it is supposed to go." I wasn't given any instructions about this by Busby. I wasn't told to bring it back to him. Busby just said here it is, go get it translated, so off I went. Anyway, then I went home. It was getting toward dawn by this time. I had a shower. I was going to have other things to do. I was going to have to interpret for Johnson later in the day. I didn't even get to bed. I went home, had a shower, and had something to eat.

About 7:00 in the morning the telephone rang and it was Joe Yager, the deputy chief of mission. He said, "The vice president wants the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup> and I understand that you've got it." I said, "Yes, Busby gave it to me and said go get it translated. I've taken it down and they have it and are translating it." Yager said, "The vice president wants the joint communiqué<sup>1/2</sup>." I said, "Okay, we'll get it up to him." By that time fortunately there were photocopy machines, Xerox, so we could make a copy of it.



Physically the joint communiqué<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> was in downtown Taipei at the USIS press office where all the translators were and the vice president was 45 minutes away at the residence of the president, the Gimo, up on Grass Mountain east of town. I said, "Okay." I called up my head translator and I said, "Photocopy that thing. Get a driver, send it out to Mr. Yager at the president's residence in Tien Mu, and make sure it is delivered to him." I thought it would all be okay, and I resumed my breakfast.

Ten minutes later the phone rang again. It was Joe Yager again. "The vice president wants to know where the hell the communiqué<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> is." This was obviously a direct quote, because Joe Yager was not given to hard language, especially when dealing with his staff. I said, "It's been copied. I've given instructions and it is on its way. You guys are 45 minutes away. It will get there in due course." I got three more calls I think before that thing finally arrived, and I assumed the vice president was satisfied.

There is a follow-on to this. My assumption was incorrect. Johnson was upset and stayed that way. Three years later Lyndon Johnson became president of the United States as a result of Kennedy's assassination. By then I was working on the Republic of China desk in the Department of State. My boss at that time, Paul Popple, now deceased, my neighbor and friend from my days in Saigon and Taichung. Paul had been on Lyndon Johnson's staff when he was a senator, and when Johnson became president he gathered up as many of his former staff members as possible to join the White House staff. He wanted Paul to handle his correspondence, so Popple did.

After Paul had been there a couple of months he said to me, "Bill, the president keeps talking about this mishandling of the joint communiqué<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in Taiwan. What is this all about? You were there." I said, "Paul, let me tell you, this is what happened." He said, "The president keeps inquiring about that and he is determined to find out who was the bastard that STOLE," and those were Johnson's words "the communiqué<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in Taipei." For the rest of the time that I worked in Washington I feared that the next telephone call was going to be Lyndon Johnson on the line saying, "You bastard I've found you now!" From time to time I would hear this feedback that Johnson was still looking for the guy who stole the communiqué<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>; and he never found me thank God. It says something about his ability to retain the tiniest details and the way in which he reacted to things when they didn't go as he wanted.

There were two more things that happened on that visit. The afternoon that Johnson arrived after we got him to the hotel I was to escort him. We were to take him down island to a nearby town where the headquarters of the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction was located. They had a big display hall there. This was a joint U.S.-ROC organization set up to bring about the improvement of agricultural methods - crop methods, improvement of livestock, and all that sort of thing - in Taiwan. It worked very well. It was very effective. It was one of the best organizations that we ever set up under the mutual assistance program.



I had scoped out the place a couple of days ahead of time, or a week or so ahead of time, and I knew the whole lay of the land. I had been there with the advance party and knew what the vice president was going to do, and so on. We arrived in the town. Johnson leapt out of the car, started working the rope line, and shaking hands with people. I was alongside of him interpreting for him.

The first thing, he said to some young woman who was there, a high school girl, "How do you get along?" What he meant was how do you survive here, what is your livelihood, and that sort of thing? I tried to interpret that for him and he was firing questions right and left. The girl said, "We don't do anything." I interpreted that back to him and he couldn't quite grasp that. It was sort of a non-conversation but he was trying to be friendly. His style was so aggressive in the way that he approached people that it put all of the Chinese on their guard just automatically. He was eager to show that he was pressing the flesh campaign style and I could see immediately this chemistry was not working.

We then started up towards the exhibition hall where the director and staff were waiting to show him what the Joint Commission of Rural Reconstruction had accomplished. The crowd was lining the streets and the Chinese police officers were shouting to everybody, "now don't move; stay where you are." They didn't want any spontaneous demonstrations there. Johnson looked at this big street with people lined up on both sides and he turned around and said, "You all come on!" as he headed up. The Chinese police immediately began shouting, "Don't move! Don't move!" in Chinese. Johnson turned to me and said, "Why won't they all come along?" I said, "Well, they are being very polite," not trying to tell him that the police were telling them to stay put. He said, "Well, how do you tell them to come on?" I said, "You say lai, lai." So he started shouting, "Lai, lai." The Chinese police began shouting even more loudly, "Don't move! Don't move! Stay in your places!" I could see what was going on so I said, "We had better hurry up there Mr. Vice President and get into the exhibition hall because they are waiting there."

We went through this exhibition hall with Johnson firing questions, me interpreting. The poor guy who was supposed to explain everything to him was absolutely petrified by the whole experience and was attempting to respond, I was interpreting. It got done, let's put it that way. I'm not sure that the vice president learned anything from it. I think that the poor guy in charge of the exhibition hall went home, went to bed, and had a drink immediately after it was all over because it was such an overpowering experience. That was the second thing that happened.



The last thing that happened was that when it came to 3:00 the following afternoon, time for Johnson to make this big speech which I was supposed to interpret, Drumright looked at me, looked at the speech, and said, "I think we had better get Commander Wei to do this." I was a bit crestfallen at the time because I had been preparing very hard to interpret for the president. I think Drumright made the right decision at that point because although my Chinese was very good - I was a four-four on the FSI system at that point it would have been a challenge to interpret for Johnson, a very difficult challenge as a matter of fact because his style was so colloquial. I think that Drumright made the right decision.

It is always best in interpreting to be going into the native language of the interpreter. That is to have someone interpreting into his or her native language rather than into a foreign language. I feel strongly about our people, particularly in dealings with the Chinese, having their own interpreters present but I think in retrospect that Drumright was wise. I was tired by that point and I think he understood the kind of stress. I think Drumright was also kind of stressed from dealing with this vice president, this Texas original so-to-speak. Commander Way did a splendid job. He was well known. He had been educated in the United States, and all the rest. He carried it off and gave it the right kind of flair for the audience and the people who were there. I don't think again that anything of political importance other than the symbolism of Johnson's visit occurred at that time. I don't think that he made any particularly important substantive statements in the course of his visit. Everybody was very much relieved when it was all over because it was kind of a whirlwind trauma.

I was the first guy to experience Lyndon as an interpreter on the trip. The stories that came back from all the people who had the responsibility in other countries down the line, very much reflected the kind of experience that I had with Lyndon Johnson. It contrasted with the Eisenhower trip in the sense that the Eisenhower trip was very well organized, very smooth, there were no incidents of mix-ups over joint communiqués. It ran in a very orderly and disciplined fashion whereas the Johnson trip was kind of serendipitous. We were fortunate in the sense that Eisenhower had come there only six to eight months previously because as I say it was a dress rehearsal for what we had to do for Lyndon Johnson.

The other thing that happened during my assignment in Taiwan was the suppression of the China Democratic Party. I was the first Taiwanese language officer in the embassy. The regimen at the language school in Taichung was to take two years of Mandarin language instruction after having an initial six months in Washington. I knew by the spring of 1958 that I was going to be assigned to the American embassy in Taipei. I asked to be assigned there as a matter of fact. The political counselor was David Osborn, with whom I had worked in Japan and who had been responsible for me starting Chinese language studies. I went to him and I asked for an assignment there, and that was arranged.



My reason for asking for that was I wanted to continue to develop my Chinese. I had learned by then that the officers who were sent to Hong Kong worked mostly in English. Hong Kong was mostly a Cantonese-speaking city in the 1950s, not a Mandarin-speaking city, and the language officers assigned there didn't have very much opportunity for the use of the spoken language. Their facility in the spoken language would gradually begin to deteriorate the longer they stayed in the consulate general. They relied very heavily on the translation staff there so they didn't work in the written language a great deal of time either.

That wasn't really what I wanted to do. I wanted to be more a part of the local scene. I may have been influenced somewhat by my earlier experience in Southeast Asia, where - particularly in Cambodia - I had become accustomed to getting around in the local community and associating with the people. The thinking among many of my colleagues at that time was that someday the mainland was going to open up and if we go to Hong Kong we are going to be right into what is going on in the PRC, in the big China, and this was a way of preparing for that experience. I acknowledged certainly the importance of that argument and also the importance of learning about the PRC from a professional standpoint, but I was attracted more to the experience of Chinese culture in so far as I would be able to participate in it in Taiwan, and it looked to me like that was a better chance. So that was why I asked to be assigned to Taipei.

The second thing was that I knew that when I went there I was going to have to cover what was called domestic politics, which meant opposition politics, which meant Taiwan politics. I thought I ought to learn Taiwanese in order to be effective as a reporter and an analyst on domestic Taiwan affairs. For the last three months that I was in the language school I devoted my study to Taiwanese. The last month that I was there I went down to a little town on the west coast of Taiwan, a place called Lukang. Lukang had been one of the earliest ports on Taiwan settled by people coming across from the mainland in the 17th century. The Taiwanese there was said to be of the purest sort, so I went to live down there for a month in order to immerse myself in that. My Taiwanese was never as fluent as was my Mandarin and I relied much more on my Mandarin for my work in Taiwan than on Taiwanese, but the knowledge that I had of Taiwanese represented something to the Taiwanese people in Taiwan, the natives of Taiwan. It served as an icebreaker for me to establish relationships in my reporting responsibilities in the next three years that I was in the embassy.

The thing that I want to mention at this point is - and it is important for what is going on right now in 1999 when I was in Lukang one man I met was a man who was the secretary general, that is to say the chief aide, to a man by the name of Koo Hsien jung. I've forgotten the gentleman's name now though I probably have it someplace in my files. Koo Hsien jung was a very wealthy Taiwanese who had prospered during the Japanese occupation. He had owned lots of sugar plantations and other things in Taiwan. His principal residence, his manor you might say, was in Lukang. He was a native of that town.



This gentleman whom I met took me out there one time and took me through this house, which dated back to sometime in the 1930s. It was one of those houses that was representative of the Asian, and principally the Japanese, taste in European style furnishings, decorations, home design, and all that sort of thing. It was a very elegant house with very nice things in it. It was a little bit run down at that point but still you could see that there was a great deal of class and wealth in this house.

When the Japanese arrived in Taiwan in 1895 after acquiring it as a result of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the Sino-Japanese war, Koo Hsien jung was one of the Taiwanese collaborators with the Japanese. He had helped guide them in finding their way, so to speak. He was the pathfinder, that's how it was described to me, for the Japanese. He of course prospered and profited greatly in the economic sense from that association with the Japanese during all that period of time.

He had four sons and one of them was a man by the name of Koo Chen fu. Koo Chen fu was the one who remained in Taiwan; the other three brothers went overseas. Koo Chen fu had had a Japanese education. He is fluent in Japanese. I think the other sons probably had a Japanese education also in Japan at Tokyo Imperial University. Koo Chen fu was also fluent in English. He had very good, very polished English.

In the 1960s Koo Chen fu was president of the Taiwan Cement Corporation. It was a government corporation in which landowners had been given stock during the land reform program in exchange for the surrender of their lands in Taiwan so that land could be distributed to those who were actually tilling the land. The Koo family lands were exchanged for this stock, and as a consequence of the large holding he acquired in Taiwan Cement Corporation, Koo Chen fu became general manager of the Corporation.

I also knew Koo Chen fu through the Taipei West Rotary Club. There were five Rotary Clubs in Taipei. As you know Rotary always invites local diplomatic officials to become members. The Taipei West Rotary Club was the Taiwanese-speaking Rotary Club. The other four were Mandarin-speaking Rotary Clubs. There was east, north, south, central and west. All the members of the Taipei West Rotary Club were Taiwanese-speaking. Since I was attempting to cultivate the Taiwanese community as a Taiwanese language officer at the embassy, I joined that club and they very much welcomed me there. Koo Chen fu was a prominent member of the club.



What was very interesting was whenever he made a trip to Japan, which he visited frequently in a business capacity, he would come back and he would report on his trip to the members of the Taipei West Rotary Club. He would do this also when he went sometimes to Hong Kong or sometimes to Korea, or other places. He would come back and make a report to our club, which used to meet on Saturdays at noontime. He was always listened to with very great respect. He was identified in the Taiwanese community as somebody who was a prominent Taiwanese with very close ties to the KMT, the Kuomintang - I think he is probably a Kuomintang member, as a matter of fact, and had been also with close ties to the Japanese establish, particularly the conservative wing of the Liberal Democratic Party, the wing of Nobusuke Kishi and Eisaku Sato, two prominent post-war prime ministers. He had good access to those people and with the leadership of the KMT, and to the prominent figures in the Taiwan opposition, not the independence movement but the opposition movement, the non-KMT, or what they called the non-party party. He is a very smart man. I got to know him well and interviewed him. He has become an extremely successful financier in Taiwan.

Koo is now the chairman of the Straits Exchange Foundation in Taiwan, the private organization set up to conduct the talks with the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits. The SEF is closely affiliated with the Mainland Affairs Council, a government organ with a mission comparable to that of the SEF. It is Koo who visited the PRC in his capacity as SEF chairman last fall. He called on President Jiang Zemin in Beijing and told him he really ought to learn more about democratic systems if he wants to understand how things are going in Taiwan these days. Koo has also represented Taiwan as two or three APEC heads of government meetings.

I think this family history is extremely interesting. I don't think that this is widely known at all. I think that I am one of the very few people who know. I am sure that there are many Taiwanese who know Koo Chen fu's background. It is public knowledge privately kept in Taiwan. It is very interesting that someone whose father was the chief collaborator with the Japanese and helped them establish themselves in Taiwan, now has become designated by the Kuomintang as a principal go-between in their negotiations with the PRC. I think that his position gives him a great deal of resonance among older group of the Taiwanese community although I don't know about the present active generation.

Q: What was your feeling with this non-party party at that time?



CUNNINGHAM: First of all I got to know many of the political leaders in various parts of Taiwan and in Taipei also. I was introduced to them in some instances by my chief, David Osborn, who had known them when he served in Taipei earlier. I was also introduced by some of the CIA people. My job was, first of all, to be in touch with them so they would feel that their views were known in the American embassy and known to the U.S. Department of State, the American diplomatic establishment. My job was not to encourage them in any way in their political ambitions.

Now there were splits among them. Some of them of course were very plainly in favor of making Taiwan an independent country and displacing the Kuomintang rule there. They were in effect anti-Kuomintang, but they could not say so publicly. Many of them were very skillful in criticizing policies of the Kuomintang and of the Nationalist government, and at expressing their disaffections without going so far as to expose themselves to the charge of treason.

In the 1950s a gentleman by the name of Lei Chen, who was a publisher and journalist, established a weekly newsmagazine in Taipei called Free China, Tsu Yu Chung Kuo. This magazine was a vocal and open critic of the Kuomintang and the Nationalist government. It was very well written and edited and highly regarded for its literary quality and journalistic quality. It was widely read by the intelligencia in Taipei and in Taiwan, as well as by the people who were not members of the Kuomintang and who were critical of Kuomintang rule. The magazine reflected their views. It was a considerable irritant to the Kuomintang and most especially to Chiang Kai-shek.

I never met Lei Chen. Lei Chen was a vocal critic, an avowed critic of the Kuomintang and he did not hesitate to make his disaffection known. What he was criticizing was the inconsistencies of policies of the Kuomintang, particularly the limitations upon personal freedoms that were guaranteed to people in the constitution under the martial law conditions in Taiwan at the time.

In 1959 soon after the Taiwan Strait crisis had moderated, Lei Chen became active in the formation of an opposition political party called the China Democratic Party, Tsu Yu Min Chu Tang I think it was called. In effect Tsu Yu Chung Kuo, his journal, became the organ of the nascent political movement. I think in fact they actually attempted to register the party or maybe they even did register it as a legal party in China. It showed signs of becoming a very powerful party. That is to say it would be a party that would have a mainlander leadership, non-KMT leadership, of people like Lei Chen or other intelligencia and the very few opposition politicians of a mainlander nature that there were in Taiwan at the time, and a very large Taiwanese constituency. By large I mean running in to the hundreds of thousands. It would have a considerable following among those who identified themselves as the "non-party party," which was pretty evident soon after it got going. That was very alarming to the KMT and also particularly to the Gimo.



The formation of this party coincided also with a constitutional crisis in Taiwan. The KMT was operating under the 1947 constitution that had been adopted in China in a popular referendum carried out through most of China, and with officials elected to public office under that constitution at that time who had traveled to Taiwan with the Gimo. In effect they used to say, they were following the practice of the Long Parliament of the reign of Charles the II and Oliver Cromwell, although the KMT did not follow policies comparable to those of the Long Parliament.

The KMT held that it had been elected constitutionally to office. It was not possible for the Government to hold elections in the territory of China. The constitution, adopted by referendum in 1947, said that elected officials shall continue in office until duly elected representatives are able to take office. Well you couldn't have elections, so nobody could be elected to take their office, so therefore they continued in office and that was the logic that they were using.

Q: And everyone in it was quite happy.

CUNNINGHAM: Everyone in office was quite happy with that. However, under the terms of the constitution the president was limited to two terms and his term was expiring in 1960. The question came to be, what can we do about this situation? It was inconceivable, most particularly to the Gimo, that anyone else could be president at that time. An amendment to the constitution would be required to remove this impediment. The National Assembly, a directly elected body roughly comparable to our Electoral College, had the authority to amend the constitution. But the membership of the National Assembly living in Taiwan or overseas, was less than the quorum specified by the constitution.

This is all covered in our reporting from the embassy in Taipei by the way. I did much of the reporting on this: how the constitution was "legally" or constitutionally amended despite the lack of a sufficient quorum in the amending body which was the national assembly; how this was done and judged to be legal so that the Gimo could succeed himself for a third term and indefinitely thereafter and in effect become president for life. That was all "handled" at that time. There is reporting to document it so we need not go into that.



The formation of this party came along just at this time when everybody was conscious of the constitutional crisis that was arising and before it had actually been resolved. Needless to say, Free China Magazine and the China Democratic Party were highly critical of this entire procedure and denounced it as another symptom of the undemocratic nature of the KMT regime. In that sense the formation of this party was a politically threatening development to the KMT. Taiwan was not a democratic society in those days, and opposition to its policies or to Chiang Kai-shek was equated with subversion at the behest of the Chinese Communists. It made no difference that the PRC was at the time in the midst of the Great Leap Forward, which was for it a political crisis, and not really in position to interfere directly in the political life of Taiwan. The perception of real opposition was enough to provoke the Gimo's paranoia. The upshot was that Lei Chen was arrested on charges of communist subversion. It happened on a Sunday afternoon, and a friend of mine, Dr. Chang Yen-tien, a U.S. educated professor of agricultural economics at the National Taiwan University, and his wife were visiting us that afternoon for tea. Somehow the radio was tuned in - or perhaps at some point that afternoon the cook came in to tell us - and we heard that Lei Chen had been arrested. My friend, who I believe was a party member, a KMT member, or at least he was not in opposition to the KMT, was absolutely aghast. I can still see his expression when we heard that Lei Chen had been arrested. It just ended the conversation. Nobody said anything more and he and his wife excused themselves shortly after that and went home.

It had a profound, shocking effect on the intellectual and political class regardless of party in Taiwan at the time. It had been a long time since anything like that had happened under the Gimo and it was a severe warning. I think very quickly the publication of Free China, Tsu Yu Chung-kuo ceased. Maybe it has reappeared since then, but it stopped publishing at that point. That whole intellectual and political community around Lei Chen more or less dissolved and evaporated.



He was taken into custody. As the guy who was doing domestic political reporting it was my responsibility to follow this case and report on it. Lei Chen was tried in a military court. I did about a 50-page report on that trial. It was difficult to do because word came down from Drumright that no one in the embassy though I think it was specially intended for me was to have any communication at all with Lei Chen's adherents and supporters, and the intellectuals around Lei Chen; there were several particularly at National Taiwan University. I operated under those restrictions but I nevertheless had to find out about the trial. The other officers in the political section, and I think particularly David Osborn the political counselor, in effect tacitly approved of reporting on the case. It was accepted that the case had to be reported and they more or less said, here's what the ambassador says, just be circumspect in the way in which you collect the information. I did not live in an American compound. I had made that decision when I moved to Taipei in 1958. I lived in a Chinese neighborhood. One of my neighbors was a magazine editor. One was a university professor. One was a national assemblyman. One was a police officer. One was a customs official. I had many contacts in the community of that sort. Also, I happened to be living just a short distance from the language program operated at that time by Cornell University under a Ford Foundation grant for American graduate students who were studying Chinese. Most of them were studying Chinese at this school but they had a lot of contact with National Taiwan University and with the faculty and intellectual community out there.

Relying upon all of these second hand and third hand accounts of what was going on, I was able to put together the details of Lei Chen's trial and the arguments that were going on. Word of mouth communication is wonderful. It operates. It is very reliable in China and you just have to be very scrupulous in collecting all of this and in doing your analysis and comparisons. Also the newspaper Ta Kung Pao, the great public daily which I had mentioned earlier as one of the papers that I scanned every day, somehow or another was able to obtain the transcript of the trial and published it verbatim, which I used then as part of my reporting.

What it comes down to is this: Lei Chen was convicted of communist subversion upon the testimony of one single government witness who said that he had conveyed a letter from somebody in the PRC to Lei Chen. This contact was sufficient to prove a violation of the martial law decree under which Taiwan operated at that time and which categorically forbade contact of any kind - - direct or indirect - - with the PRC or the CCP. Lei Chen was convicted and sent, I suppose, to Green Island where most political prisoners were imprisoned in those days. He was sentenced to 20 or 25 years. I remember reading of his release, or impending release, many years later, and I think it may have even been after Chiang Kai-shek died. I don't know whether he is still alive or not. That trial was a real kangaroo court, and the verdict really ended the China Democratic Party.



There were a couple of meetings afterwards of the remaining leadership of the party, one in Taipei and one in a place called Feng-Yuan, at that time a remote rural town down in central Taiwan, at the home of one of the movement's leaders. That was an important meeting. I learned through my sources of the people who had been present at that meeting so I went to interview them discretely. They were very reluctant, of course, to talk about any of this at this time. It took a lot of effort on my part to assure them that I would respect their confidences.

After the suppression, Lei Chen's arrest and conviction, there was a split in the movement. There were actually three components to this split. Taipei was mainly a Mainland Chinese city at that time although the Taiwanese population of Taipei was the majority population, it was about 60-30. But they were not the power holders in Taipei. Those leaders of the movement for the new party who lived in Taipei were very conscious of the pressure of the government. They thought that the suppression made clear that it was time, in effect, to just call off, not to continue to push things, to lie low and wait for a better day, and to more or less keep the structure of the party intact but not to push for any further agitation or activity of any kind. The people in the south, particularly from Tainan southward through Kaohsiung and into Pingtung Prefecture, all of which is heavily Taiwanese, were the ones who said, "No, this is the time we ought to push harder. We ought to really try to push our cause. We think that the arrest of Lei Chen shows the fear of the government, so we shouldn't let up the pressure at this point." There were some vocal people in that group whom I knew also who were advocates of that, particularly the mayor of Tainan at the time, the Yeh Ting-kuei.

I did a report also on this meeting and in my analysis after and we labeled these factions the "go-fast" and the "go-slow" sections with the go-slow people being the northerners, so to speak, in the capital, and the go-fast people being the southerners elsewhere. The southerners, the go-fast wing, was egged on by a group known as the Taiwan Independence Movement that was based in Tokyo and led by a man named Thomas Liao. There was a Liao family and three Liao brothers who go back to the uprising against the government in 1947 and who had to go into exile afterwards. There were remnants of that movement in the United States and in Japan still. They were all in favor of course in pushing the independence line. They were out and out for the independence of Taiwan. They were in favor of supporting the go-fast wing, the southern wing, of this new opposition movement.



The northern wing prevailed. It prevailed in part because economic conditions in Taiwan began to improve as a result of the U.S. economic assistance programs and as a result of the policies of the government, which at that point began to shift first of all towards industrial development and offshore manufacturing. In other words it was like what we call the Maquiladora program here in Mexico and in Texas. They were setting up export production zones where the components of foreign products could be brought in, finished, and then shipped out. It would provide employment to excess labor in Taiwan and bring earnings into the local economy but it would not add to the imported consumer goods on the local markets. There were still very heavy duties and restrictions on imports at that time. The infusion of that money into the economy along with the U.S. assistance program provided much of the capital that was necessary to develop Taiwan's economy.

The other component of this is that at that time in 1960-1961, but particularly in 1960, U.S. economic assistance policy in Taiwan shifted toward encouraging the government to develop a consumer economy. There was a very important speech given by Wesley Haraldson, the head of the AID mission, at what was called the Friends of China Club, one of the other principal hotels in Taipei. It was to a civic group. I don't think it was to a Rotary Club meeting but it was to something like that. It was a forum where Haraldson very strongly advocated the merits and the benefits of a consumer economy and in effect he said, "You've got to develop a consumer economy. You've got to become consumers."

His advocacy of that point was very important because it gave encouragement and support to an element within the ROC government at the time that also saw this as the way to improve Taiwan's economic condition and to get away from the sort of situation where you were attempting to develop a garrison state; an austerity economy where you sacrificed everything in order to support a military establishment whose purpose was going to be to recover the mainland. Of course local Taiwanese business people were in favor of this also, and that is where much of the wealth was as a matter of fact; in the hands of the Taiwanese, not in the hands of the mainlanders. It used to be commonly said in those days that the mainlanders have the power and the Taiwanese have the money. There was a great deal of truth to that in that comparison.



We were very fortunate in that time in Taiwan because the leadership in the economic elements of the government, the government organization that was set up to handle U.S. economic assistance, the ministry of Economic Affairs, the finance minister, and so forth, were staffed by people who had been educated at the London School of Economics, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, in Europe, and in various places like that. They were forward thinking. They were Keynesians. They had been exposed to the Keynesian idea of economic development and expansion. Haraldson I think in that sense was a Keynesian also. Philosophically the leadership of our economic assistance mission, our AID mission, and the economic leadership of the ROC government, were in tune with one another. They both were, of course, out of sync with the KMT's political philosophy of austerity and sacrifice, which was of a different order, but these "Keynesians" managed to prevail.

By the way, Haraldson was also supported by Joseph Yager, the deputy chief of mission. Yager was not a China specialist. He was an economist. He was one of those people who were Wristonized into the Foreign Service in the 1950s. After his service in Taiwan he became the director of East Asian Affairs in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, as it was then called, in the Department of State. Yager and Haraldson were very much both of the same mind as economists as to what the economic future of Taiwan should be. Yager was very much trusted by Drumright. I think that trust between Yager and Drumright was very important in influencing the development of American policy at that point and in helping Taiwan to become an economic powerhouse that it is today.

We talked at that time and I mentioned it in an earlier tape about the "takeoff" of the Taiwan economy. Walt Rostow had published his book.

Q: Which was a series of indicators, Iraq was one of those ready to take off.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. And Taiwan was identified as an economy that was on the verge of takeoff, by many people, Rostow included, at that point. It is very interesting because a man by the name of Paul Sturm, whom I had known in Vietnam ten years previously and who was an old time Foreign Service officer, was the head of Embassy Taipei's economic section. Sturm had been consul general in Hanoi, as a matter of fact, in the 1950s and then somehow got to Taiwan. He was not a China specialist. He was not an Asia specialist. He was one of those people who was a Europeanist. French was his language; that's how he got to Vietnam. That's the way things worked in the Foreign Service in those days.



I remember very, very clearly in a staff meeting in the embassy conference room in Taipei, a large meeting involving most of the substantive officers at the embassy, chaired by Paul Sturm on the question of Taiwan's economic takeoff. Sturm said very clearly, "I do not see this happening at all. I think that Taiwan's economic takeoff is going to be like the gooney bird on Midway Island. It runs down the runway flapping its wings but never gets airborne." He made that pronouncement about the fall of 1960 or the spring of 1961. Well, God bless Paul Sturm, rest his soul in peace, but here is Taiwan today one of the "Tiger economies of the 1980s and '90s and one of the few economies that has survived the East Asian economic crisis of the last two years very successfully indeed. They seem to know how to make economic policy out there very, very well.

Q: I want to go back to the arrest of Lei Chen. Today in the 1990s, or in the 1980s even, we would have been all over the Kuomintang government protesting saying this isn't the way to do this. You couldn't have sat still for it. What about at that time, was there any effort or movement at all to say really we should tell Chiang Kai-shek that by doing this he is squelching democracy and that this is a bad thing?

CUNNINGHAM: I'm glad you asked the question because it reminds me of something that I should have mentioned earlier. I know that it was certainly widely recognized among the Chinese intelligencia that this was an unjust accusation and action. Even for my translators with whom I worked on a daily basis and who helped me a lot with gathering information on this case felt this way. Although it was never explicitly said, they were very quick to point out those things that were clearly unjust about Lei's case, as were other people with whom I came into contact. There was a lot of head shaking among my peers, that is to say second secretaries and so forth in the American embassy, over this thing.

I think at the time when the trial was either nearing the end or when the verdict had been delivered and sentencing was going to take place, I've forgotten exactly at what point it was, but near the climax of this trial, I sat down and I wrote a short memorandum to David Osborn, the political counselor. (I was second secretary in the embassy at this point) I wrote to the effect that "We claim to be supporting democracy against totalitarianism and repression all over the world. We claim that this is a democratic state in Taiwan and yet this blatant injustice is taking place." I don't know if I put it this eloquently and I'm probably embellishing it a bit but the thrust was this, "Very clearly here is this unjust decision. Clearly this has been a rigged trial. It's a kangaroo court. It is a judgment that would not stand up in any court of law. I believe that the American embassy has the obligation to say something to the Chinese government about this and we ought to do something." My memo wasn't very long; it was just a short paragraph less than a third of a page. It was very clear from all the reporting and all that data as to what was going on.



I wasn't very clear as to what we might do or could do. I remember I typed this up myself on those letterheads that we had at the time for internal office memorandums. I took it up to David's office. A short time later he brought it back to me in my office. That in itself was unusual because I was located in a wing of the embassy building separated from the suite where most of the Political Section was located. David handed the memo back to me and said, "This isn't going to go anywhere. If I send it on through, you know how the ambassador (Drumright at the time) is going to react to this. It is just going to cause a lot of trouble for yourself. I think you ought to pull it back."

Drumright had a point of view that simply would not allow any questioning of the conduct of the Nationalist government on points of this kind, or any challenge to them. He just couldn't see that it would lead to anything productive and he couldn't see that there was any U.S. interest in making any objection to that. He really had wanted us to stay far away from this trial and not become involved in it. My reporting on it, which I am happy to say was supported and encouraged by David Osborn and the other officers in the political section, nonetheless had to be very circumspect. That's why I say if you did any reporting it had to be well documented. I worked hard to prepare a thorough, objective, and completely documented report, but I had to gather my information in a very circumspect way and in a way that did not show or indicate any intervention on the part of the United States government into this proceeding. This was one of those sad examples of the reluctance, even resistance, all too frequently in my experience at least to consider analysis, opinion, or views advanced in good faith and in loyalty to our government, but critical, or at least, questioning of our policies. I did take my memo back from Osborn. He was realistic I suppose. I have never been happy about that. I have no doubt as to how Drumright would have reacted if it had gone through. I don't know what would have happened but I felt vulnerable at the time. That statement by Osborn, I don't think that there was a chance that the ambassador would have accepted it. I don't know whether the ambassador would have referred the question to Washington at all. He could have said a member of my staff thinks there is something wrong here and we ought to look into it and maybe say something. I don't think Drumright would have done that. I think Osborn was correct. There wasn't any dissent channel in those days at all. There was no way that a junior officer who thought that somebody in the government ought to have a second look at this, could get that kind of a recommendation through, so there it was.

A year or two later when I came back to Washington, my colleagues on the desk and I had a chance to talk about it among ourselves. Everybody recognized that this was a rigged trial, it was a trumped up charge, and the verdict was a foregone conclusion. It was entirely political. It was unjust. It couldn't be defended under any terms whatsoever.



Drumright was not highly regarded by the China specialists in the service at the time. They thought that he was overly swayed by the Nationalist's position; that he wasn't able to see what was truly happening in social and political terms in China as a whole; and that he was overly partial to the Nationalist's position. That's a judgment of history. He was certainly well liked by the Nationalists and regarded as somebody who was friendly to their cause. Most of the China specialists did not think that Drumright was realistic in his analysis of the Chinese situation from the American viewpoint.

Q: This of course is part of the reason why Ambassador Drumright had the reputation of being a hardliner as far as China was concerned, and in a way a bit of a dinosaur.

CUNNINGHAM: Overly subject to the line of the Kuomintang.

Q: Yes. But it also points out something that maybe he was representing. I've heard it said that when John Kennedy came into office President Eisenhower said to the effect, "I'm going to support you in foreign policy but don't mess with China." Kennedy came in with a very small majority. He barely made it and it was sort of disputable. It was felt that Kennedy didn't feel that he could fight many battles. The China lobby and all this was just not one of those battles that he was going to fight, and he didn't.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, and it's very interesting. We should talk a little bit about that episode because Drumright lost his job soon after Kennedy came into office. Johnson came to Taiwan early in the Kennedy administration, May or June of 1961, and Drumright was the ambassador at that time. Drumright stayed on until about 1962.

Somehow or another it was told to me at the time (and this needs to be investigated) that the administration decided that the right move for us at that time as a way of showing some kind of opening to the PRC, some desire to get through to them, was to recognize Mongolia as an independent country. Donald Zagoria had published his book on the Sino-Soviet split and there was a certain community within Washington who believed that the Soviets and the Chinese were falling apart. This rupture was as a result of the Quemoy bombardment in 1958, of Mao's wish to use nuclear weapons at that time, Khrushchev was horrified by this, and so on. There was some thinking along those lines and the idea of recognizing Mongolia was seen as a way of exploiting this split between Beijing and Moscow. The administration decided that it wanted to recognize Mongolia and this became the first big irritant in the relationship between the Kennedy administration and the Republic of China.



Everybody in the China business at that time, regardless of political persuasion from Drumright to the most leftist, knew that the quickest way to offend any Chinese is to somehow or another interfere with their claim to sovereignty over part of what is considered sacred Chinese territory. I think by that time, 1961 or 1962, the PRC had probably recognized Mongolia and established diplomatic relations with them as a way of gaining access to the international community, but Mongolia at that time was not a widely recognized country at all. I think it was only Soviet bloc countries that maintained diplomatic relations with Mongolia. And the KMT considered it sovereign Chinese territory, and still does today. The latest yearbooks published by the government on Taiwan contain maps showing Mongolia as part of China.

Q: I think it was also in the UN.

CUNNINGHAM: No, I don't think so at that time. Anyhow, so far as the Republic of China was concerned, Mongolia was a Chinese territory and that was certainly true of the entire KMT establishment. There was no sympathy in the Republic of China for the U.S. establishing diplomatic relations with Mongolia. I think the people in the Kennedy administration just did not understand. They were looking at the PRC-USSR relationship and they were thinking only about that. They did not realize the explosiveness of this question in terms of our relationship with Taiwan. Drumright tried to explain this and in that respect I think he had the support of everybody in the embassy because we all- (end of tape)

Drumright made it pretty clear in his reporting to Washington that this was a no-no. By that time I was director of the language school in Taichung so I was not involved in this. Well you know how it is with new presidents, new administrations, new parties in power, and so forth, they don't really welcome reporting and analysis that is critical of something that they have decided is going to be a leading point of their policies.

Meantime the ROC ambassador in Washington was George Yeh Kung-chao, a very distinguished man who had been foreign minister. He was a very urbane guy and was very much respected by everybody. He was trying to explain to his government, to Taipei, why the Kennedy administration wanted to do this, what their thinking was, and to recommend ways to them to deal with it.

I think at one point the vice president of the ROC, Chen Cheng, was sent to Washington to try to explain the situation to Rusk, or Kennedy, or Mac George Bundy, or somebody at this point, "the best and the brightest" of those who were in Washington at that time. Well, they didn't get it. They weren't understanding it at all. Meantime back in Taipei the ROC was not understanding it either. There was a complete mutual non-communication on this whole question.



From the standpoint of Washington, Drumright was doing a lousy job of putting the point across to the ROC. From the standpoint of Taipei, Yeh Kung-chao was doing an equally lousy job of putting the point across to Washington. I think it was one of those situations of what the hell kind of ambassadors are you people if you can't get this across? The problem was that both of them were holdovers from a previous time. Yeh Kung-chao was a holdover from the Eisenhower time in Washington and Drumright was a holdover in Taipei from the Eisenhower time. On the part of both capitals, our ambassadors were not persuasive the way ambassadors were supposed to be; they weren't turning the other party around.

The first thing that happened was that George Yeh was called back for consultations, presumably for a week. He had this week of consultations in Taipei and then while they thought about that he decided to take a tour of Taiwan and just do a little sightseeing. He came to Taichung and visited the language school. I thought this was a marvelous opportunity for the Chinese ambassador in Washington to talk to these language students. I took him all through the school and showed him around then he talked to the students.

He did not bring up the question of Mongolia specifically but he said, "You know it is very difficult being a diplomat because the problems that come up for us in diplomacy in many cases are just a lack of communication. My advice to you as diplomatic officers is to work very hard maintaining good communication. If you've got good communication then problems will take care of themselves. It is just a matter of understanding things clearly." I think what he very clearly had on his mind was that he understood that both sides just weren't getting it and there had been a breakdown in communications between Washington and Taipei on this question.

It is very poignant because Yeh Kung-chao, to my knowledge, never left Taiwan after being recalled. He was a calligrapher and a bamboo painter, and so as many Chinese gentlemen do, he went into a sort of gentle retirement in Taipei and devoted himself to bamboo painting and calligraphy. Several years later he was made a minister without portfolio of the government but he never went abroad again, even for a short visit. He had offended, or failed, the Gimo, and was thereafter confined to Taiwan. Later he did become a Minister without portfolio in the ROC government, perhaps in the administration of Chiang Ching-kuo.



Almost concurrently Everett Drumright was recalled to Washington. There was a big sendoff for him. One of my colleagues, a man by the name of Sherrod McCall who was a Chinese language officer and who at that time was assigned to the embassy in Taipei as a second secretary in a different capacity from what I had (I think he was deputy chief of the political section) told me about Drumright's departure at the airport when he was leaving for Washington. He said, "Bill, you know Drumright just did not understand what had happened to him. He was uncomprehending of the situation. He was breaking down." Sherrod was Drumright's principal aide and briefcase carrier. He said, "I had to say to him, 'Mr. Ambassador wipe your nose.' He was becoming very emotional over this thing and he simply didn't get it." Of course Drumright was recalled and he never came back to Taiwan in an official capacity, although he did make a number of trips there and always was well received. He was replaced as ambassador by Alan Kirk who was a Kennedy protégé, so to speak. As a footnote, I recall that some years later Sherrod told me that while serving as Drumright's aide he had a chance to review the files and papers that the ambassador kept for his personal reference. Sherrod remarked on that occasion that he came to see a side of Drumright that the rest of us did not see, and Sherrod remarked, that the insights so gained caused him to "respect and sympathize with Drumright." Sherrod never said more than that, so I don't know to what he had reference.

Q: It wasn't Admiral Wright? It was Kirk?

CUNNINGHAM: Admiral Wright succeeded Kirk. It was Alan Kirk. Alan Kirk had been commander of the allied flotilla in the British Channel on D-Day and got to know the Kennedy family in that way. He was long retired. (There is a little more to the Mongolia story too, by the way.) The administration made the judgment that they wanted a senior military officer out there as ambassador to establish communication with the G-Mo. In other words the Gimo would look upon a military officer as a kind of professional peer, not a State Department diplomat. That was the reason for the selection of Kirk. He went out there at some point.

When I was working in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs later on in the '60s while Harriman was assistant secretary for East Asian Affairs, there was some point at which Kirk questioned one of our policies. I've forgotten exactly what was the question at that point. Harriman blew up and said, "Send Kirk a telegram and tell him it is time to get on board American policy."



On the Mongolia thing, this question continued to come up throughout the Kennedy administration. It did, by the way, make good policy sense to recognize Mongolia if we wanted to exploit the Sino-Soviet split, once that became clear and was accepted as a reality in Washington. Mongolia was definitely a Soviet satellite, but with the Soviets and the PRC at loggerheads, Ulaanbaatar could have been bolstered somewhat by greater international acceptance. So there was a rational basis, at least in hindsight, for promoting this idea. Recognition of Mongolia would not have helped our relations with the ROC, but it couldn't afford to protest overly, and it would not have been seen by the PRC as an overture from us to a better relationship.

I remember very well, I think I was working on the Mainland China desk in the later part of the 1960s sometime between 1965 and 1967, and again we revived the question of recognizing Mongolia. Now this was after the Chinese had detonated their nuclear device, after the signing of the partial nuclear test ban treaty in 1963, and after the split between the Soviet Union and the PRC as acknowledged by everyone. Again this issue of recognizing Mongolia arose and we actually sent a fellow by the name of William A. Brown to study Mongolian at the University of Washington where there is a Mongolian language course.

Q: He ended up in London actually.

CUNNINGHAM: He ended up in London, Israel, and Bangkok, but he never got to Mongolia.

Q: I'm interviewing Bill right now. He ended up translating the Soviet history of Mongolia into Mongolia, I think, from Russian. He was marking time there.

CUNNINGHAM: I don't think Bill Brown ever set foot in Mongolia, certainly not in active duty and maybe not as a retired officer.

Q: I don't think he ever went there. Maybe he has once in retirement.

CUNNINGHAM: Anyway we had him in training and there was a woman officer who was also in training with him. They were to be the two to be sent to Mongolia. We kept sending memoranda up to Dean Rusk asking what about recognition of Mongolia? Dean Rusk never said no on the question of Mongolia. He always had more questions about this recommendation. He would think up questions and send them down to us for review. We would dig around.

Q: This was while you were on the desk?



CUNNINGHAM: That's right, as a desk officer. Lindsey Grant I believe was the chief of the Mainland China desk at that time and his deputy was David Dean. You ask both of these guys about this whole thing.

Q: I've interviewed both of them.

CUNNINGHAM: Ask them about Mongolia. At any rate we would work this memo up and send it back up to Rusk. I was not responsible for this but it was a small office and I knew what was going on. We would answer Rusk's questions and send it back up. We would hear nothing for a long time. Finally we would call up Rusk's office chief of staff or something and say, "You know that recommendation on Mongolia, where is it?" "It's in his in-box." "Could you shuffle it up to the top of the in-box?" The guy would shuffle it up to the top of the in-box and first thing you know it would come back again with more questions. I think there were at least three or four rounds of this thing during Rusk's tenure as secretary of State. It never was approved by Rusk. It never was disapproved by him; he always had more questions to ask about it. I don't really know what it was that motivated Rusk. In other words why Rusk was not willing to buy into this idea of recognizing Mongolia.

Bill Brown is one of my good friends who was trained in Mongolian and the other one was Stapleton Roy, now ambassador to Indonesia who also was trained in Mongolian. I've forgotten where he took his training. It may have been the same place. He was supposed to go to Mongolia and he never got there either. Finally the first ambassador of the United States to Mongolia was a fellow by the name of Richard Williams. Dick Williams never resided in Mongolia. He was ambassador to Mongolia concurrently with being chief of the China desk in the Department of State. He had been consul general in Hong Kong. He would go to Mongolia from time to time. The first ambassador of the United States to reside in Ulaanbaatar was a fellow who now lives in Dallas by the name of Joseph Lake.

Q: Is Joe Lake here?

CUNNINGHAM: Joe Lake is in Dallas. He is now the director of international affairs for the city of Dallas. I don't think that Joe took Mongolian language training and I don't know if anybody else has taken Mongolian language training to tell you the truth. Maybe by now we have got somebody who knows Mongolian. Joe was the first resident U.S. Ambassador, and that was not until sometime in the early '90s.

Q: I think it probably was.

CUNNINGHAM: Because his next post after that was Albania.



Q: I've interviewed Joe about the Mongolian time. It does seem that we are talking now when the Kennedy administration came in, that there wasn't much to draw on as far as knowledge of China or of how to deal with it. Did you have that feeling that they were sort of Europeanist oriented?

CUNNINGHAM: In general I can't think of anyone in the Kennedy administration either on the National Security Council or in the Department of State at the level of assistant secretary or above who had a good understanding of Asia. Now we have to remember that Dean Rusk as secretary of State had been in the CBI.

Q: A colonel and drew the 38th parallel.

CUNNINGHAM: And drew the 38th parallel and had that kind of exposure. It may be there that they looked to him for policy advice. Averell Harriman was appointed as assistant secretary for East Asian Affairs and was in that capacity when I reported into the Department of State in 1962. He obviously didn't know anything about it either. His dad had built railroads in China but I don't think that Averell Harriman had that much knowledge about it. His principal deputy at the time I think was Ed Rice, now living in Tiburon, California, long retired. He was a China specialise of the old timers, trained in Beijing in the 1930's. I think it was Rice, though I'm not sure. Above the working level there really wasn't anybody that I can think of who was really up to it on Asia and had had the experience on the ground and knew things.

That is the legacy of the McCarthy period and the clean sweep that was made of Oliver Edmond Clubb, John Stuart Service, John Carter Vincent, and all the rest of them at the time. There wasn't anybody left to come to that level. Bob Barnett was the deputy assistant secretary for Economic Affairs in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs and he is one of the trio of Doak Barnett...

Q: Who just died ten days ago.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. And Dwight Barnett. I think Alan Whiting was in the Department of State at that time as chief of research for East Asia. That was sort of it. There was really nobody higher up that I can think of. Harriman was sent off to Vienna to try to arrange some kind of a cease-fire in Laos early in 1963. Roger Hilsman, who had been Director of INR, came in after Harriman as assistant secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Roger Hilsman is an egomaniac and a namedropper. I don't have any regard for him at all. He's gotten a lot of notoriety in international affairs but I frankly don't...

Q: His only experience in the area was as a lieutenant in the OSS dropped into Burma. He lived off that as a doer. He had been head of INR but he was not a heavyweight there.



CUNNINGHAM: Not at all, and he really didn't know how to deal with anybody. I remember one experience when I had written a briefing paper for a call that T.F. Tsiang, Tsiang Ting-fu, who was then the ROC ambassador to Washington was to make on Hilsman. T.F. Tsiang was a very distinguished man, a veteran diplomat, an intellectual, with a Ph.D. from Columbia, a true gentleman. He came into Hilsman's office and Hilsman immediately lit a cigar. T.F. Tsiang had emphysema, and it was well known that he was beginning to suffer a lot from it at that time. Hilsman sat in a chair at right angles to the office sofa and right next to the chair to which he motioned Ambassador Tsiang.

Q: It's about three feet.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. Then Hilsman, with cigar in his left hand, briefing memo in his right hand, and Tsiang to his immediate right, put his left foot up on his right knee with the sole of his shoe pointing in T.F. Tsiang's face. This was Hilsman's awkward way of attempting to be at ease with a visitor, whom I suppose he realized was a man of some distinction in his own right. Hilsman started on his spiel, and the subject had something to do with China's representation in the United Nations - - our constant operating preoccupation. After making a few opening remarks, Hilsman turned to me and said, "This is what you wanted me to say isn't it?" I said, "Well sir, you had the memo." T.F. looked at me and looked at him, and I suppose wondered just how much reliability there was to U.S. backing for the ROC. It was an extremely graceless exchange, even rude. I don't think Hilsman - - in his own self-consciousness - - had any understanding that his effort and bonhomie was not only transparently artificial, but tasteless as well.

Hilsman used to go around the bureau and he spoke of everybody in Washington by their first name: Jack, Bobby, Mac, Chet, Chip, this, that, the other, as though he had a personal and intimate relationship with each. You were supposed to know by his first name dropping that he was very close to the high level people in the Department then and in the Administration. He would speak about everybody very familiarly. After Kennedy's assassination, it quickly became clear that Hilsman's manner was complete sham. He delivered a major speech mainly on China policy in December 1963. This speech was mainly drafted by Lindsey Grant on the Mainland China desk, but evidently was not fully cleared by the White House, newly taken over by Lyndon Johnson. When Hilsman made that speech, which contained language more forthcoming to the PRC (I have it somewhere in my files I'm sure) than had been the case up to then and at that level. Everything hit the fan in the White House, and Roger Hilsman was very quickly replaced by Bill Bundy as assistant secretary for East Asian Affairs. I think at that point Hilsman went off to Columbia University or something. He was out of the government.

McNamara in his book had also stated that we didn't know what was going on in Asia.



Q: I've had other people say the hell he didn't. Some of the stuff he was told but he just chose not to listen.

CUNNINGHAM: A fellow by the name of Lou Soros, I think, who was in INR at the time wrote an op-ed. piece for the New York Times soon after McNamara's book was published saying, "I sent these memoranda up and this was our analysis and recommendation at the time. They were rejected, disregarded, whatever, but our analyses were being sent them." It was there. The point is I think, at the time there was the knowledge available in the Department of State, and it was good and sound. The language and area training program had been ongoing throughout the 1950s and had been producing capable China specialists who were all over East Asia at that point, but all were at the working level, none at the policy level. The knowledge was available. Then there were people like Art Hummel. I've forgotten where Art was during the Kennedy administration but he was someplace out there. There were people who knew, who understood, and who could have provided advice but somehow it wasn't getting through; it wasn't received.

Q: There was a certain arrogance too as there is in an awful lot of administrations, I have to say.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Q: I think we might stop at this point. I'll put at the end here that we covered a little bit of when you moved back to Washington. We're talking about the early '60s, '61, '62 when you came back to be on the China desk. Is that right?

CUNNINGHAM: That's right. I came back to Washington in July or August of 1962 to take up my duties on the Republic of China desk, which we had at that time. We also had a Mainland China affairs section. We have ever since the 1960s, I believe, had two China sections, and still do in effect in the Department of State.

Q: We'll talk about that. We've already covered Taiwan, the Mongolian situation of should we recognize it or not during the time when you were on the China desk, and we've talked a bit about Roger Hilsman. We'll pick it up then.

\*\*\*

Today is the 3rd of June 1999. Bill you were on the Republic of China desk from when to when?



CUNNINGHAM: From summer 1962, I think probably the first of July though maybe a little earlier, until 1964 or 1965 at which time I switched to the mainland China section and served there through 1966. I went off to Columbia University for a sabbatical year at the East Asia Institute in January of 1967.

Q: We're not sure whether we've covered it or not but you might talk about the representation problem.

CUNNINGHAM: My main responsibility during the time that I was on the Republic of China desk was to ensure that the Republic of China retained its seat in the United Nations and in other international organizations both within the UN family, as we call them, the 13 specialized agencies, and other international bodies that were not related organically to the UN system but nonetheless which had a symbolic political importance in the international scheme. The thinking at that time was that if the PRC gained a toehold in any international organization no matter how insignificant and unrelated to the United Nations, that would be the first domino so to speak. We looked at it more as subverting the international system from the bottom up getting into the roots and gradually getting all the way up into the branches and the trunk of the tree, of the system.

Of course every year our big push was to deal with the annual challenge to the credentials of the Republic of China in the United Nations General Assembly. By the time that I reached the desk in 1962 this process had achieved a standard rhythm and a routine scenario. Along during the summertime the ROC embassy would approach the Department of State to say that the General Assembly session is coming up and we want to make sure that everything is in order. This was a discreet way of reaffirming the assurance of U.S. support for the ROC's position as the legitimate representative of China in the United Nations. This approach usually was made at the desk level and to me when I got into the job. That routine demarche would trigger a circular telegram generated by the Republic of China desk, which had to be cleared with every bureau in the Department as well as with the Bureau of International Organizational Affairs. A man by the name of Bert Wabeke in the IO bureau was my counterpart, and I worked with him on this China representation question. We would circularize all of our posts abroad to warn them that the General Assembly session was coming up and that there would be a challenge to the credentials of the delegation of the Republic of China to sit in the General Assembly. Now the Security Council was never an issue in these circulars because China is a permanent member of the Security Council and the UN charter in fact identifies the Republic of China as the permanent member of the Security Council. It is a continuing body and there would never be an issue of the credentials of the representative of the Republic of China in the Security Council unless there was a change in permanent representatives. We'll come back to the Security Council and the difference in a moment and continue with the General Assembly.



Our circular telegram would go out instructing our embassies abroad, those that were in capitals of countries friendly to the Republic of China and friendly to the United States, were known supporters of the position of the Republic of China or opponents of the PRC, to go into the Foreign Ministry and say, now we are counting on you to support the credentials of the Republic of China delegation in the forthcoming General Assembly session and this is why we think you should. We would fashion a series of arguments to support our position that the Republic of China should be the representative of China in the United Nations, usually citing the misbehaviors of the People's Republic of China as one of the principal arguments against this. Their conduct had shown that they were not peace loving people and that they were not entitled to represent the Chinese people in the General Assembly.

Q: I would imagine that one of your jobs on the desk would be to collect the problems of each year, to keep a list. Every time you read that something had happened in someplace you would sort of jump up and down and add this to your list.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right. Burt Wabeke and I kept a running log of the misbehaviors of the People's Republic of China and the things that they were doing that we thought that we could use as arguments against a change in the representation of China. Now the period that I was there in 1962 to 1964, a period of about two or three General Assemblies, of course was the end of the great leap forward and the beginnings of the Cultural Revolution in China, so it was easy to come up with all kinds of evidence saying, "Look how these people treat their own. Can you imagine what harm they are going to do to world peace if they get into the United Nations?" We would send this out and we would ask for responses.

Then of course we would tally everything that came in. We had several categories: those that were very firm and that we could count on and that were reliable; those that were perhaps wavering a little bit and indicated some uncertainty; those that were sitting on the fence; and those that we knew were a lost cause, the Warsaw bloc for example and the Soviet Union. I think India was a strong supporter of the PRC, as were Indonesia, third world countries, members of the African-Asian bloc, and so on. Anyway we would tally all this up and we would sometimes go out with a second round to the ones that looked a little bit shaky or uncertain and follow-up with them. Our objective was to get as many firm commitments as we possibly could by the beginning of the General Assembly session.



We also would look very carefully at those that we counted upon for support to see whether they had paid up their assessments to the United Nations and thereby would be able to vote. There were some countries that would fall in arrears. Another track that we would follow was, "Make sure that you pay your UN dues. We are going to count on you for this vote and you had better get your payment in there." We would follow up on that. We would then of course lobby the delegations at the General Assembly in New York. Normally the bureau would deploy a liaison officer to go up there. I had that duty during the 17th General Assembly. One of the principal duties for that officer of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs was to go around and lobby all of the delegations on the Republic of China question.

What would happen in the General Assembly is that the reports of the credentials of all delegations would be sent to the credentials committee of the General Assembly, which would then examine them to ensure that the credentials of each delegation were in good order. I think that committee was appointed by the president of the General Assembly. Our delegation would be in touch with the president of the General Assembly to find out who was going to be on the committee. We wanted to make sure that we had the right balance in terms of China representation on the committee so we would get a favorable vote out of that. Of course, all General Assembly committees have to be carefully chosen to reflect the balance of persuasions in the United Nations by region, stage of development and political outlook. The committee would consider the credentials during the entire session and finally toward the end of the General Assembly session the credentials committee would make its report to the plenary of the General Assembly. The General Assembly normally does not overturn committee reports; it rubber-stamps them for the most part. It is very difficult to open up a committee report in the General Assembly; the rules make it difficult to do so.

Of course the report of the credentials committee of the General Assembly would be the occasion for the debate on the legitimacy of the Republic of China to sit in China's seat in the United Nations. We would have to prepare the U. S. delegation with a statement, and arguments, and respond to whatever challenges would be brought up by other countries and supporters of the PRC in the General Assembly debate. My job was to maintain close contact with the ROC embassy in Washington D.C. to keep a running tally on all the members of the General Assembly, to follow up on the instructions to the field, to make sure that the right instructions went to the delegation in New York, to work with the Bureau of International Organizational Affairs on that, and then to do all of the back stopping that was involved and that was in two dimensions. One was to watch what might be going on in let's say, if there is such a thing, the International Rose Fanciers' Club where there are national representations of some kind or other just to make sure that somebody didn't try to sneak a Chinese communist delegation into whatever seat was legitimately occupied by the Republic of China.



The other thing that we followed very closely during this time was the policy toward China of newly independent countries because the decolonization process was going on. I got so good at all of this that I knew the names of every foreign minister in Africa and the capitals of every country there. I could reel them off in my sleep because I was sending off telegrams all the time to our embassies out there saying, "Now make sure that the foreign minister understands who are the good Chinese and who are the bad Chinese and that they work very closely and establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of China." Of course the ROC was doing its bit during this time too. It wasn't all up to us. They deserve credit.

My very good friend Yang His-k'un, whom I saw in August of '98 when I visited Taiwan, very old now and fully retired, was the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROC. I believe he was Director of UN affairs Bureau in the foreign ministry when I served in Taipei and then later on he became a Vice-Minister and Ambassador to South Africa. He was the best known Chinese in Africa, better known on a personal basis than Chou En-lai. This was because Yang had been in the UN Secretariat in the 1950's and had been a member of UN visiting missions going out to these countries while were still colonized, helping them prepare for independence. The UN sent out these missions to help set up their governments and prepare them for self-government. Yang got to know all those people who were leaders politically in those days, but were nobodies internationally, and who later on became foreign ministers, prime ministers, etc., etc. He was great friends with all of them. Yang would go off every year on a grand tour of Africa and other countries, but particularly Africa, seeing all his old friends and jollyng them up. Yang was an extremely good diplomat. He was a very effective man.

As the economy of the Republic of China improved it also introduced a number of aid programs, particularly agricultural assistance programs, in these countries. The Republic of China government had had very good success with land reform and agricultural development in Taiwan. They had good, legitimate programs to show like crop improvements, livestock improvements, pest control, seed development, land use methods, and so on. They extended technical assistance to a lot of countries in Africa to build cordial relations with them. There was kind of a competition which I monitored very closely.

I worked on three levels. On the General Assembly level, on watching the international organizations with governmental representation that were not UN related but nonetheless were official organizations in the international community. I worked with the Republic of China embassy to follow up and to coordinate our efforts with them and to consult with them. It was a full time job as liaison with the ROC embassy, monitoring the UN agencies and other unrelated international organizations, and working with our embassies in the developing countries as they established diplomatic relations upon independence. I also was just kind of monitoring what was going on in China and what was going on internationally as it related to this China representation issue.



Q: You moved over to the Mainland China desk from '65 to '67?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. From early '65 or late '64. I was essentially two years on each desk.

Q: What was going on in mainland China because I get confused about when the Great Leap Forward stopped and the Cultural Revolution started? What were we seeing in China and how were we interpreting it? How did we see it developing at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: There were three issues involved at that time. The first was that the Great Leap Forward had ended about 1962 or 1963 catastrophically, as we now know. There was a famine during the last years of the Great Leap Forward and according to some statisticians the population of China shrank by a couple of million during that period of time from 1960 to about 1963 or 1964. Then of course there were recriminations within the Chinese political structure and inner councils as to what had caused this setback, the failure of this policy, and what the remedy should be.

The upshot of that was the great Cultural Revolution in which Mao Zedong went over the heads of the Politburo and the political leadership of the PRC to the populace as a whole in an attempt to do two things. One was to counter the criticisms of those who blamed him for the failures of the Great Leap Forward, this utopian scheme that he had, and secondly to reinvigorate what he felt was the flagging revolutionary spirit of the population. He launched the Red Guard movement and the little red book studying the thoughts of Mao. Of course he had lots of people helping him who were dependent on his success for the future of their own political careers. I suppose some people there are in every organization and every society were true believers in the doctrine.

Q: How did we see Chou En-lai at this time?

CUNNINGHAM: Chou En-lai was highly regarded in the community of China specialists, that is to say within the government and also within the scholarly community. Chou was looked upon as the moderator, the urbane, the cosmopolite, the man who understood how the world worked and who knew how to accommodate the relationships between societies that were different ideologically, economically, and politically, from China, always to China's advantage. He was seen as the go-between, the mediator, and he was idealized in this role by a lot of people including myself at that time.

Q: Did we see him as a creature of Mao's?



CUNNINGHAM: No, we did not see him as a creature of Mao. We saw him as a partner. As somebody whose advice was very influential with Mao Zedong and as somebody who could not act on his own, but who exercised a great deal of influence over the direction of Chinese policy and in a way as a counterbalance to the ideology and the utopianism of Mao Zedong. The main interest I think in the Department of State, and particularly on the China desk, was Chou En-la's role in international relations and in China's foreign policy, not so much his role in domestic policy. Obviously he had a great deal to do with domestic policy and had an important role there because he was the Prime Minister, but we emphasized more what he was doing in the international field than what he was doing in the domestic field. The transition from the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution was one major preoccupation, one of the major centers of attention of the Mainland China desk at that time.

The second concern of the Mainland China desk was China's policy towards the war in Vietnam because it was in 1964 that things really began to heat up in Vietnam. We were moving towards the decision to commit ground troops there. The Tonkin Gulf incident, the alleged firing upon the USS Turner Joy, I think took place in the fall of 1964 if I'm not mistaken. I get a little bit mixed up on the sequence of events. That was a watershed event; the retaliation and the air strikes against the North Vietnamese in retaliation for the firing upon the Turner Joy. We were moving into that and we were watching very closely. Would the Chinese come into the war or would the Chinese not come into the war? How would they behave towards this? The backdrop for that was the Sino-Soviet split, which was worsening all this time. How the Chinese- (end of tape)

The second preoccupation was what the Chinese would do with or in opposition to the Soviets with regards to supporting Vietnam. It was a triangular game there. The Chinese obviously did not want the Soviets to gain the predominant position in Vietnam and in effect outflank them and become the second major player in Southeast Asia in counterpoint to the United States. On the other hand, the Chinese were weakened by the Great Leap Forward. They were in the throes of the Great Cultural Revolution and things were going haywire all over China. The transportation network was severely stressed. The Vietnamese were pleading for material support of all kinds, logistical support. The Chinese were shipping a lot to the Vietnamese by various means. And then the Russians were expecting the Chinese to ship the Russian logistical support through China to support Vietnam. The Chinese were not up to handling all of that. Their capabilities were strained by domestic requirements and there was an overburden that they simply could not handle. But, if they protested too much or resisted too much on those grounds, this would be looked upon by the Soviets as failing to support a fraternal socialist people against the imperialistic American aggressors and would be looked upon by the Vietnamese as a betrayal and provide an open door for Soviet influence to increase in Southeast Asia, which the Chinese did not want.



This whole triangular, complicated relationship was going on there and we were paying a lot of attention to trying to figure out what the Chinese were going to do and how they were going to behave in this situation as it affected our interests in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. I participated in a couple of war game exercises relating to this program. Two of them in the Pentagon during that time. They took place down in the basement of the Pentagon where people tried to project certain scenarios of one sort or another. Much of it was directed towards what would the Chinese do if...?

Q: What was our feeling then. Here you have a China which you describe as not being able really to take care of its own and yet in the Vietnam War we were projecting a China that was in a sense trying to increase its empire. We considered it a threat all over. It wasn't just Communism, but the Chinese themselves.

CUNNINGHAM: Well, there were two trains of thought and I think each gave some credence to the other. One was that China was too weak, did not want to confront the United States, had done so in Korea and learned the difficult lesson militarily, and just did not want to go to war with the United States. So, the Chinese could be expected to support the Vietnamese as fraternal allies against the "American imperialists" but would not commit their own forces or get themselves into a situation where Chinese blood would be shed as a result of American weaponry or military action. They would avoid that contingency.

On the other hand, there was a great deal of extremely hostile propaganda coming out of China at that time directed at United States policy in Vietnam. Much of this propaganda was whipped up by the fervor of the Great Cultural Revolution that was going on in China at the time. The Great Cultural Revolution was a rejection of all things Western and led to the destruction of every vestige of Western influence that anyone could find in China including the destruction of all pianos. Anything that was corrupt, bourgeois, alien, Western in any way was either criticized and denounced or destroyed. People were hounded to denounce such ideas. That campaign meshed with the tenor of the Chinese propaganda or pronouncements with respect to the American involvement in Vietnam.

So, it was puzzling. You could make the argument that the Chinese were whipping themselves up to get involved militarily in this thing and at the outset you really couldn't be sure because you could see both sides of this equation and either scenario had a certain amount of credibility to it. So, we had to play it by ear and keep testing this thing as we went along.



One of the main ways of testing it was through the ambassadorial level conversations in Warsaw that went on at that time. During the early part of the 1960s, the period that I was on the Mainland China desk, those conversations were held pretty regularly about once a month. I was not involved in the preparation of the instructions for our representatives at those talks. It was Ambassador Cabot who conducted them at that time. But, I would see them as they went out and I would see the readout as the reports came in. I was not involved in briefing the Republic of China embassy, which we regularly did at the deputy assistant secretary level. As soon as we got the report from Warsaw, the embassy would get a call to come over to get briefed on it. So, I was close to all of the output and input to it. These conversations, when the transcripts become available, are going to be pretty polemical on both sides. What we were doing on our side was countering, debunking, and denouncing the arguments that the Chinese had made in the previous round. You know, "You said so-and-so and here is our response to that." These transcripts, particularly the Chinese, then were very carefully analyzed to see what clues they might give us toward the direction the Chinese were taking in regards to Vietnam and in regards to their relationship to the U.S.

But, there were other things that we did through Warsaw to make sure that after a while nobody stumbled on the trip wire. For example, there was one instance in which a U.S. aircraft flying a mission over the South China Sea fired a missile and the thing went astray and went into Chinese airspace. The Pentagon let us know about that right away and we fired off an urgent message to Warsaw to inform the Chinese embassy that a missile had gone astray and entered Chinese air space and probably landed somewhere in China. It was a mistake and there was nothing intentional about this. Please understand that it was not an attack on the PRC but just a misfire. I think there was an incident where a U.S. pilot either overflew Chinese territory in South China or was downed by antiaircraft fire or something. We very quickly notified the Chinese of this also. What we began doing was working very hard to reassure them that we had no hostile intent towards the PRC.

In the meantime, of course, there were some people in China who were talking about the development of nuclear weapons and nuclear capabilities and making very strong statements in this regard. But, now in retrospect we realize they were of a defensive nature and were not intended to be threatening or illustrative of Chinese intentions towards the U.S. and Vietnam. But, at the time that attracted a lot of attention. We were trying to figure out just what they meant by making such volatile and inflammatory statements.



I would say that a considerable part of the energies of the Mainland China desk during those years was directed towards the Chinese policy in Vietnam. I used to prepare every morning a short memorandum digest for the assistant secretary based upon incoming overnight telegrams and FBIS readouts. I would get in before the opening of business, the Department used to open about 8:30 in those days and Bill Bundy, the Assistant Secretary for East Asia, had a 9:00 am staff meeting. I would try to get in before 8:00 and pick up the overnight take from FBIS and pick up the telegrams. I would skim through to see what there was in there that should be drawn to the assistant secretary's attention and provide a little bit of interpretation or *prüß 1/2 cis* - this is what this means. Some of my memos were good and some were bad, but it was a kind of daily grind that you had to go through. The key thing in all of those was what's new in regard to Vietnam today from the China standpoint. That was the main thing that I worked on.

Other things that we worked on, and I am reminded of this because I saw Art Dornheim yesterday at lunch. Art was on the desk with me and he was the guy who was responsible for monitoring the embargo on trade with the Peoples Republic of China. Of course, when we instituted this embargo in the 1950s it was as hermetically sealed as you could possibly make it. In fact, it was so tight that afterwards people realized that it didn't allow us to buy the "Peoples Daily" in Hong Kong, so we couldn't translate the thing to find out what the Chinese were saying. There had to be exceptions granted.

Another thing that was going on during those years on the China desk, and it influenced me later on, was that we were trying to find small ways in which to gradually ease the limitations upon contacts with the PRC because we felt that if the PRC were too confined, too constricted in its contact with the outside world the new generation rising up since liberation in 1949 and gradually taking positions in the bureaucracy there would not have a true perspective on the United States and the outside world. It was considered unhealthy for the future of China's relationship with the world for it to be completely sealed off from what was going on.



For example, and this is an extreme example but it is representative of both the restrictions and of the lengths to which we went. Art was responsible for monitoring the embargo on trade with the PRC, which was total. There was an instance in which a 12 or 14 year old boy, who was a pheasant fancier out in South Dakota, sent a letter to somebody in the Department of State, probably the secretary, and it ended up on Art Dornheim's desk. In the letter this boy said that he knew there were pheasants in North China, as there are pheasants in South Dakota on the prairie. He had been corresponding with a counterpart in North China who was a pheasant fancier and this counterpart was willing to exchange pheasant eggs with him so that South Dakota pheasants could be hatched in North China and North China pheasants could be hatched in South Dakota. The boy wanted help in getting an export license from the Department of Commerce that would lift the ban for strategic purposes on trade with the Peoples Republic of China to allow a non-monetary exchange of pheasant eggs between the U.S. and the PRC by this young boy and his pen pal in North China. That is illustrative of the extremes to which we went to prevent any commercial contact whatsoever with the Peoples Republic of China under the Trading with the Enemy Act. Art Dornheim worked on this thing and succeeded in getting an export license for the exchange of pheasant eggs. He did things like that periodically. There was a little tally that we kept there in the office. Each one of these successful cases represented a further step in removing barriers to contact between the U.S. and the PRC. Very incremental barriers.

Of course, there were times when there was a natural disaster of some kind or other in the PRC and we offered humanitarian assistance, medicines and food assistance. In most instances the Chinese declined those offers, but in making them we were assured we would be able to obtain an exception to the ban on commercial exchanges or exchanges of any kind with the People Republic of China to permit that sort of thing to go forward. And, I'm sure there are other instances, but I don't recall them offhand now, of steps that we took to increase communication with the PRC.



We also used to assiduously scoop up every scrap of information we could from any traveler who went to the PRC of any nationality who had had contact with people at the top levels. For example, Felix Greene, who I think is a British or New Zealand correspondent, made a couple of trips into China in the 1960s and when he came out he would be contacted by the consulate general in Hong Kong and be debriefed fully. They would report back and we would have some questions to be put to Felix Greene wherever we could find him. We used to debrief Edgar Snow, who made a couple of trips to China, in Hong Kong, and I think in the U.S. He was exhaustively debriefed each time. There was a Yugoslav correspondent in Beijing whose reports we used to find very, very informative. He had good contacts in the establishment there and his news reports and analyses were very useful to us in understanding what was going on in the PRC. But, all of this was a laborious process, not only on our desk but in FBIS, INR, the CIA and every other open source we could possibly find to help construct from all the available information some kind of a picture of what was going on in the PRC, what they were thinking, what they were believing, who was important, who was under attack within the establishment, etc. Then to attempt through third parties to validate, verify or discount some of these impressions. It was like diagnosing a patient whom you couldn't see or touch.

Q: What was the attitude on the China desk about eventually recognizing China? I would have thought with the turmoil within China this didn't feel like a good time that you could really get very far with anything.

CUNNINGHAM: There were two schools of thought, both, I think, within the Mainland China section and more broadly within the bureau and particularly between the Mainland China section, the Republic of China section....we can broaden it out a bit more. There were really four, maybe five, corners to this analysis. The Republic of China section, the American embassy in Taipei, the U.S. consulate general in Hong Kong, and the Mainland China section in the Department of State. I think you might say the body of China advisors, scholars and analysts who are close to the diplomatic establishment in Washington, including the intelligence community. People like Doak Barnett at the Brookings Institution, other respected people who were very good analysts, had spent time in China, devoted their lives to studying it, provided much of the background material and were in regular communication with the Department of State, particularly with the Mainland China desk. There were some who were cordial to the idea of actively seeking to broaden contact with the PRC with the eventual goal of establishing formal relations. Cognizant, of course, of all the difficulties that would be involved in that in terms of our relationship with the Republic of China, in terms of symbolism with regard to the cold war as a whole, in terms of perceptions of the PRC and what our motivations were, and everything else that you can think of. And then there were other people who were very wary of this idea and did not see any redeeming features in the PRC establishment that would warrant initiatives on the part of the United States. Did not even think they would be reciprocated by the PRC. They weren't necessarily against the idea.



I was one of those who was wary and had serious reservations about this. My reservations were very strong at the time that I joined the Mainland China desk, but over the two years that I worked there those reservations moderated when I understood better what was going on. So, using myself as an example of those who were very conservative and reserved about this idea, initially when I first joined the China desk in late 1964 ...I wanted to work there in order to be a true China specialist, but I did not go there with the expectation or intention that I would contribute towards the development of a relationship with the PRC. Rather, I would go there with the expectation that I would be working in a very guarded fashion with regards to the initiatives and what the PRC might try to do. But, the more you worked in that field, regardless of your persuasion, the more you came to realize that this is a country that cannot be ignored. It is there, you have to deal with it, you have to cope with it some how, and I did not leave that job with any understanding of how that might be done, any formula for doing that, but what I did leave there with was the belief that things would have to change and we would have to move in that direction. Somehow or other an accommodation of some kind was going to have to be reached in dealing with the PRC.

So, I believe that is a fair description of the classifications. I do not recall that there were ever accusatory relationships among the people who were the China specialists of my generation who worked on this problem. We were a special generation because for the most part, almost all of us had had no experience on the PRC mainland. Our only contact and understanding of Chinese personalities and attitudes was formed through study in graduate schools at universities in the United States such as Columbia, Harvard and Yale. Burton Levin, for example, a very good friend of mine and colleague of this period, is an example of that. Burt is a graduate of Brooklyn and did graduate studies at Columbia University in the East Asian Institute, a very fine institution. And there were others like Morton Abramowitz, who got his training at Harvard. So there were people who had that kind of background. There were some people like myself who didn't have that academic background but had some kind of experience in Asia and then came into the Chinese language program under FSI auspices studied Chinese and did area studies, which was more or less self-selected reading and some lectures in the Foreign Service Institute at that time. That was true of several dozen of the China specialists who came into the service in the 1950s or at the end of the 1940s and worked all through this period ('50s, '60s and into the '70s) to some extent under the guidance of people like Al Jenkins and Graham Martin and others who had served in China as very junior officers in the 1940s. We had the benefit of their wisdom and viewpoints. And people like Ed Rice, who was trained in the 1930s and worked on China in the 1940s. What we were deprived of was the experience, and the vision and viewpoint and understanding of people like John Stuart Service, John Davies, John Carter Vincent and others who were very strong China specialists but who had been eliminated through the McCarthy purges of the early 1950s. We didn't have the benefit of that kind of guidance and mentorship in developing our points of view. That was a handicap.



I don't mean by that that we necessarily would have bought their viewpoint, but it was a gap in the development of our capabilities. All the time that I worked on China affairs I was always very conscious of what I didn't know. From what I learned through my contacts and work in Taiwan and my studies and other experiences in Asia I think I developed a pretty good understanding of the Chinese mentality and personality, their outlook and philosophy. I have great respect for my colleagues with whom I worked during that period and many of whom have very fine minds and understanding of things, but I don't think that there were any "greats" among us on the scale of people like George Kennan with regard to Russia and the Soviet Union, not that level of thoughtfulness, and probity and understanding. Maybe there never will be, I don't know.

Q: Speaking of the Soviet Union, from the China desk, how seriously did we at that time look upon the differences between Red China and Red Soviet Union?

CUNNINGHAM: I don't think that we accepted the Sino-Soviet split until the partial test ban treaty was concluded in 1963. Donald Zagoria had published his book about 1960 or 1961. It came out just at the beginning of the Kennedy administration. Even by the time that I reached the China desk in 1962, this thesis was very widely disputed and discounted within the Department of State.

Q: His thesis being?

CUNNINGHAM: That the Chinese and the Soviets had reached an irreconcilable division between them and that they should not be looked upon as common allies but rather as potential adversaries of one another. That point of view was very widely questioned. It was not accepted as the basis of our policy, certainly, at the time I arrived on the China desk. We still saw areas of cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China, but then when the test ban treaty took place and Harriman went to Moscow to sign the treaty, the Chinese denunciation of the Soviets for entering into that convention was fierce. From that time on, I think the general view changed and it became accepted that the Chinese and the Soviets had reached a point where they could not be regarded as working hand in glove with one another any longer. There were serious points of dispute between them. There were border clashes. And, of course, in October of 1964 the Chinese detonated their own nuclear device, which the Russians did not like at all and which exacerbated Soviet fears of China. Again, this background became very important in the analysis of Chinese and Soviet behavior in regards to the Vietnam War. I think people have to understand it was a very complex puzzle that we were trying to figure out at that time as to how each party would behave and how this would affect the outcome of our war in Vietnam.



Q: Were you on the China desk ever sitting together with colleagues on the Soviet desk and running through notes to see if there were any changes on how things were going, or was this each done on its own?

CUNNINGHAM: That is a very interesting question. We did not have a lot of communication with the Soviet desk on a regular basis. That is to say, we didn't get together with them daily and hash things over. But, we did have contact with them. I think at some point we deployed a China specialist to the embassy in Moscow.

Q: Yes, I think Bill Brown was one.

CUNNINGHAM: Bill Brown was one. Stape Roy was another.

Q: But at the desk level? You were in the same building.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right and around the corner from each other. I remember going over there from time to time with telegrams to clear and getting kind of a quizzical response from people on the Soviet desk. It was sort of, well, you people don't really understand the Soviet mentality because what you are saying in regard to this particular problem is a little bit out of the context of our understanding of the Soviets and the Soviet mentality. And, our comment was that they didn't understand the mentality of the Chinese. This was not a hostile relationship, but there was a clear perceptual separation, you might say, that I think to some extent militated against a close coordination of effort on the part of the U.S.

Q: I was just thinking. The State Department and the Department of Defense usually had one of their assistant secretaries having breakfast together once a week or so. I would think that you should have had almost the equivalent of that at some place with a relative senior person in the China and Soviet areas. Just getting together and talking to each other once a week or something like that.



CUNNINGHAM: There wasn't a rivalry, but I cannot recall any systematic coordinated attempt to cultivate on the part of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs a relationship with the Soviet desk. Obviously we cleared telegrams back and forth and obviously we communicated with one another, but I cannot recall that we ever made a systematic effort to understand the point of view of the other and to talk it over and to get together on a regular basis. In fact, I do not recall on the part of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs any systematic, organized attempt to compare, discuss or contrast our understanding of what was going on in our region with the understanding held by officers in other regions like South Asia. After all there were Indian-Soviet border clashes during this time. We didn't have a cross cultural approach at that time to the fashioning of our policy. Maybe that is one of the weaknesses of our organization institutionally of the Department of State that by dividing the world into regions we have to some extent compartmentalized the development, fashioning of our policy with the countries of those regions.

Q: From your perspective at the time, what was the role of Dean Rusk? He obviously had concerns in Asia, but one has the feeling that he was working so hard with Vietnam that the rest of Asia kind of fell by the wayside as far as his focus was concerned. Did you have any feel of input there?

CUNNINGHAM: As the 1960s went on, Vietnam more and more took over the foreign policy agenda of the U.S. Rusk more and more devoted himself to being the prime defender of the administration's policy in Vietnam. Part of that was the personal relationship that Rusk had with President Johnson. My understanding at the time was that there was a very strong bond of trust and fraternalism you might say between the two of them. Rusk could be counted upon any time that the question of Vietnam came up to go right down the line in the most rigorous defense of the U.S. position in regard to Vietnam. The prime example of that was the hearings in the Senate foreign relations committee conducted by Fulbright on the Vietnam War. At one point I think Rusk was up there perhaps two full days, maybe longer. He was questioned in exhaustive detail by Fulbright principally but also by other members of the committee as well. He was staunch and unyielding in defense of the administration's position in those hearings.

I suppose that more and more our relations with other countries in Asia came to be measured by their attitude towards our policy in Vietnam. It is not that we had no bilateral interests, obviously we did and attended to them, but the Vietnam War became an all-consuming consideration in setting the tenor of our relations with the other countries in the region.

Q: In January 1967?



CUNNINGHAM: In January 1967 I left the Bureau of East Asian Affairs and went to Columbia University under the FSI auspices to do a year of study on East Asia. I was there for the entire year. Normally people go at the beginning of the fall semester and stay through the academic year, but our 5th child was due in October 1966 so I had the opportunity to do this sabbatical year but I asked to have the beginning of it deferred until the spring semester began so that I could be home for the birth of our 5th child and help with things around the house. That was granted and as a consequence I had not only the spring semester and fall semester of 1967 at Columbia, but also the summer session there.

Q: Columbia, 1967. Everything went explosive the next year didn't it?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Q: How did you find it from your perspective and what you were doing at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: The Vietnam teach-ins had already begun the previous year. The campus movements of opposition to the Vietnam War got underway in 1967 and there was evidence of that all over the campus. Of course, other things were going on, too. This was the period of the civil rights movement in the United States and that was picking up a lot of steam. The civil rights act had been passed two years previously, so there was a lot of agitation about that. and the two tended to play into one another in some respects among student activists. I can't recall ever being personally confronted by anybody over our policy in Vietnam, but there was obvious growing of dislike for it both among faculty and students on campus. Among the faculty at Columbia there was again a difference of opinion about what we were doing in Vietnam, where this was leading, and I can't recall too clearly now, what the various opinions were. I personally was cordially received by all the members of the faculty in the East Asian Institute and elsewhere and got to know many of them very well. There were a few occasions when I was called upon to discuss U.S. policy in Vietnam, about which I had serious misgivings, myself. After all, I had been in Vietnam during the French war against Vietnam and I saw how that turned out. And, as I think I said previously when I was called up to Bill Bundy's office one day in the '60s and was told that the marines were going to be landing, we were going into Vietnam with ground combat forces, I had a sinking feeling that this thing was not going to work because of what I had observed during the earlier period when the French were fighting on the ground against the Viet Minh. So, I had mixed feelings about it. When called upon to explain the administration's Vietnam policy, I, myself, had serious reservations about the wisdom of that policy and what the outcome would- (end of tape)



I left Columbia University and went on to my post at Tokyo in 1968 just before the Tet offensive, which was the big turning point in Vietnam. There was obviously rising discontent and it was quite evident on the Columbia University campus, particularly in the fall of 1967 academic year. By that time I was getting busier with my studies and I decided to do a monograph on the attitude of the Chinese Communists towards the United Nations in the period prior to liberation leading up to the beginning of the Korean war. So, I was pretty well buried in research on that and going home on weekends to help out with the family and a lot of personal preoccupations. So, I wasn't seeking opportunities to get involved in foreign policy discussions up there.

I do remember one time when I was asked, to go up to Providence, Rhode Island with two others to speak about our policy in Vietnam to a church group on the campus of Brown University. This was in the fall of 1967. I agreed to do that. It was a trying experience. My point was that our main motivation for getting involved in this action from my own personal observation and what I understood of U.S. foreign policy was to counter a force that was hostile to the ideals and purposes of American democracy. We were fighting people who were inimical to our way of life.

One of the other two people on the panel who had been sent either by Washington or was from Washington complimented me on the presentation that I had made and thought it was very good and that I would have to write it up, because it was extemporized, and send it into the State Department, which I did. I don't know if it ever went anywhere or saw the light of day again.

Q: In early 1968 you went to Tokyo. Is that right?



CUNNINGHAM: Yes. Either late in the fall of 1967 or early in 1968 I began to realize that the wonderful year at Columbia University was coming to a close and I would soon be going elsewhere and it was about time for the Department of State to decide what they wanted to do with me. So, I went down to Washington to inquire about this. I went to the Department of State and this was one of the oddest events of my career. I was walking down an empty corridor on the 4th floor through the East Asia area of the Department of State, where all the country desks are located on one side of the hall and the administrative offices on the other side of the hall. All of a sudden out of a door down the corridor ahead of me came the man who had succeeded me in Phnom Penh thirteen years previously as administrative officer, Kyle Mitchell. I said, "Hi, Kyle, how are you?" He was then the executive director of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. His reply bowled me over. "What do you think about that assignment to Tokyo?" I was dumbfounded. I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, that is where you are supposed to go. You had better go around to the Japan desk and ask them about it." I said, "Well, okay." I kept on going, around the corner to the Japan desk and walked in. Dick Sneider was the country director at that time. I went in and said, "Dick, I was going down the hall here and met Kyle Mitchell and he said something to me about going to Japan." Dick said, "Yeah, that's right. We want you out there in the embassy and you are going to get orders to go. Do you have any objections to that?" I said, "No, no. That is terrific. That is wonderful. I came down here to find out where I was supposed to go." So, that was it. I guess I owe that assignment to Dick Sneider. He picked me out to be first secretary, head of external affairs in the political section in Tokyo, which deals with the ministry of foreign affairs. So, I was delighted. I went home and told my wife and she was delighted too. So, we started getting things ready to move to Japan. I had to finish this manuscript that I was writing and get myself out of Columbia University. We finally got to Tokyo, March 1968. Skip Purnell was acting political counselor at the time, I believe. I settled into my job as director of external affairs in the political section of the American embassy in Tokyo.

Q: You were in Tokyo from 1968 until when?

CUNNINGHAM: March 1968 until June 1971. This was a significant period in our relations with Japan because the main thing we were doing at that time was to prepare for the retrocession of Okinawa to Japanese administration. As a result of the settlement, the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the understanding reached at that time, the U.S. would continue to administer Okinawa which we acknowledged was sovereign Japanese territory, but the governor of Okinawa in effect was an American. I was not involved in the negotiations that ended this arrangement.

Q: That was Dick Sneider's jewel wasn't it?



CUNNINGHAM: Yes. When I got to Tokyo, David Osborn was the deputy chief of mission and U. Alexis Johnson was the ambassador. This was the third time that I had worked with David Osborn. He had been my boss in Sapporo when I was vice consul. He had been my boss in Taipei when I was second secretary in the political section and he was political counselor, and now he was the DCM, and I was First Secretary of Embassy. That was a grand opportunity to work with an old friend and somebody who I respected very much.

The other interesting thing was to work for U. Alexis Johnson, who was a veteran ambassador and East Asian hand. There are two things that I remember about U. Alexis Johnson that I think are important to recall.

He had a reception every month at his residence for all the new arrivals to the embassy to welcome them. It was just for us with nobody from the diplomatic community at all. He and Mrs. Johnson would welcome us as friends and colleagues and members of the family. There would be a little socializing and after a while the ambassador would ask everyone to sit down and he would give us a little talk about how to get along in Japan. He said that he realized that most of us didn't know Japanese and that it was a difficult language to master and that there were many things about the formalisms of Japanese life that were somewhat off putting for foreigners. But, he said that there are a couple of things he had learned that always helped him get along in this country. "The first thing is when you are going out anywhere make sure you always have a notepad and a pencil in your pocket. Japanese know English, they study it from the third grade, but very few of them speak it well. If you speak to them in English they are going to get terribly flustered and embarrassed because they don't know how to answer and they will think they don't understand you at all. So, there is a mental block that develops. What I have learned is if you have a question you want to ask a Japanese write it down. They can all read very well. They will understand it and be much more at ease. Then they will either answer you in spoken English or they will write down the answer for you. In any case, they will accommodate you and take care of you because they are very kind to people who are guests in their country." He then said that a good way to break the ice with the Japanese is to ask them something about their country or their home town or where they come from, who they are, that kind of thing. Ask about something that is in their background. That is one image I have of U. Alexis Johnson, a very wise man, I think, with a lot of experience about how to get along in a foreign culture.



The second thing is a little episode early in 1968. We had already worked out the retro-cession of the Bonin Islands to Japan. Those are the islands where Iwo Jima is located. They too had remained under U.S. administration along with Okinawa after the San Francisco Treaty. Somebody, probably Dick Sneider, then still country director in the Department, engineered this retrocession, decided that it would be a good idea to use the Bonin Islands as a test case for the return of sovereign Japanese territory to Japanese administration. The Bonins were unique because the people who lived there are not Japanese, they are kind of the offspring of whoever was on the islands in the first place and co-mingled with people who got shipwrecked or somehow ended up there. We wanted to make sure that their interests were taken care of. That was part of the negotiations that we conducted with the Japanese. The Japanese understood very well that this script was a dry run for the retro-cession of Okinawa.

So, it came time to execute the press release for this and that had to be cleared by Washington, DC. One of my colleagues drafted a suggested press release, Rodney Armstrong, a Japan specialist, Japanese language officer. He was in the section of which I was in charge so it fell to me to take this draft up to Ambassador Johnson to be approved. I read it over and there was something in the text that was a bit obtuse in the sense that you could infer from the press release that this was making a comparison to the eventual return of Okinawa, but it wasn't explicit. I was puzzled by this. I was newly back to Japan and not fully tuned in to the subtleties of life and diplomacy there. I thought to myself, why don't we just come out and say explicitly what our purpose is. Why leave people guessing? After all it is an American press release.

I took it into the ambassador's office, it was mid day and he was sitting behind his desk, which was absolutely clear, nothing on it. He was smoking a cigarette and reading a book. I was struck by that and thought, hmmm, here is Ambassador Johnson heading up this big embassy with 30 government agencies represented and he is just reading a book and taking it easy in the middle of the day while everyone else is slaving away, working hard. I gave him the telegram and he read it over and said, "What do you think of it?" I said, "Well, you know, Mr. Ambassador, I am kind of puzzled as to why we are not more explicit and direct here about the Bonins being a dry run for the Okinawa retro-cession." He looked at it and then at me with those twinkling blue eyes of his and said, "Oh, I think it is better to leave things of this kind to the imagination rather than to come out and be too direct about them," or something to that effect. He said, "I sort of side with the French style of diplomacy in matters of this kind." I said, "Okay."



Later on I mentioned this to somebody. I said, "You know, the ambassador was up there reading a book and as soon as he signed the telegram went back to reading the book." And somebody said to me, "That's his style. He doesn't get involved. He counts on us to know our jobs and to attend to them. His style is, if you need help, he will get involved. When his help is no longer necessary, if you let him know that, he will get uninvolved. He is depending on his staff to be professional enough to carry off its job on its own." I thought, "Well, that's a pretty good boss to have. He will backstop you if you need but he is not going to interfere in something if it is unnecessary. He saves his heavy ammunition for the big battles." So, I admired that very much in Johnson.

My work during those three years in the embassy involved three things. My work was liaison with the ministry of foreign affairs. There was not very much English spoken outside the ministry of foreign affairs in Japan in those days except in the very small international community and I did not know Japanese. I had the hope when I went there that I would be able to develop capability in Japanese since I also knew Chinese very well. That is to say, the written language should not have presented much difficulty for me. If I could learn the spoken language reasonably well then I hoped to be able to develop a capability in the written language also. So, I took the 100 hour intensive course in spoken Japanese that they used to offer in the embassy. After that it was up to me to take an occasional lesson. The short of it is, I never developed a spoken Japanese capability. There was so much work to do that I simply could not find the time or the energy to invest in the homework that I had to do in order to develop a capability in spoken Japanese. That was a disappointment for me that I wasn't able to do it. People told me that wasn't unusual because it is a very difficult language and I certainly believe them after that experience. But, as a result I was restricted pretty much to the diplomatic community and the ministry of foreign affairs as far as my work was concerned with Japan at that time.

Our policy at that point was to make the Japanese as fully our partners in diplomacy as the British were. That was the slogan. In other words, we shared everything with the Japanese. This was just the beginning of that period. So, every day I would look over the incoming traffic and the telegrams to see what issues we had internationally in the world at large that we wanted to tell the Japanese about. We wanted them to know our position. It was not necessarily issues that related directly to Japanese interests or U.S. interests. It would extend to matters that involved our global interests and the whole broad scheme of international affairs.

For example. I cultivated the head of the Middle East desk and would go over and talk to them about what we were doing in the Middle East, what was going on, and what the Japanese assessment of developments in the Middle East might be. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 had just taken place and how did the Japanese see this situation and how we saw the situation, etc.

The same thing with Africa and to some extent with Latin America, and, of course, particularly with regard to China and Southeast Asia. Herbert Levin was also in that section and he was a China specialist and during my time there mainly handled China issues with the Japanese.



Another issue that was going on was the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) at the time. I spent a lot of time talking with the people in the arms control part of the foreign ministry about this treaty and what we were doing and trying to persuade them that Japan should become a signatory of the NPT. There was resistance on the part of Japan at that time to adhere to the NPT. The question being raised, particularly on the political right, in Japan was that by adhering to the treaty the Japanese were giving up a nuclear option. They were sacrificing something that would be important to their national interests. This was the argument that was being made in political circles in Japan against adherence to the non-proliferation treaty. But, I think the real reservation on the part of the Japanese was that they were sympathetic to the argument of the third world countries which was, "well all right, if we are going to forswear the position and development of nuclear weapons there has to be some progress on the part of the nuclear weapons powers towards nuclear disarmament." The Japanese as a result, became active in the subsequent modification of the draft non-proliferation treaty to impose that obligation in the convention upon the major nuclear powers the U.S., France, Russia and the UK. So, that was really the point. I can't remember specifically any conversation where this was made explicit to us, there may have been. Herb and I were both doing this work with liaison with the foreign ministry. But, certainly, and I am sure I did some reporting at the time or Herb and I did together, that made it very clear that this should be inferred from what the Japanese were saying to us and that indeed that did represent their bottom line position in regard to the NPT.

There were a couple of other things that I worked on at the time. One of them was the Micronesian claims settlement. The Japanese we claimed owed the Micronesians, a trust territory administered by the United States at that time, \$10 million in reparations for the losses the Micronesians had sustained of various kinds during the Pacific War. These negotiations had been going on for 15 years and there had been two previous rounds in these negotiations. For some reason or other, in 1968, the Johnson administration decided that they were going to settle the Micronesian claims issue with the Japanese. In November, after Johnson decided he was not going to run for reelection he busied himself with cleaning off his desk and tidying things up and this was one of the undone tasks that had come down to the State Department from the White House.



So, off I went to the ministry of foreign affairs having been designated as hitter on this issue. I went to the American desk and said that we are going to want to settle the Micronesian claims with you folks. They said, "Oh, we are not so sure we want to do that because we don't agree with your point of view." I said, "Well, I have instructions that we are going to bring this up and you are going to be seeing me about that." They said, "Okay. And you realize that you are bringing this up just at the end of the year and we are going to go on New Year's holidays when everything shuts down around here. So nothing is going to get done." I said, "I realize that, but they don't realize that in Washington and I will let them know." Not only that, but New Year's holidays in Japan is preceded by Christmas holidays in the U.S. so we could count on at least two weeks of time out during this crucial period when this unsettled issue was to be resolved quickly. The Japanese said, "Okay," and we agreed on a date that we would have these negotiations.

Washington deployed Steven Schwebel, who was then in the legal advisor's office, to come out to Japan and conduct these negotiations. Steve came along with his briefcase full of briefing papers and we set up an initial session at the foreign ministry. They provided the room for negotiations and we went over there and Steve made his initial pitch. I can still recall him saying, "We have this proposal for you. We think it is a fair proposal and we not only hope you will agree to it, but we believe you should agree to it." They listened to us very respectfully and then asked a whole bunch of questions. Then I guess there was the usual ceremonial protocol lunch or dinner that evening. Something that Steve consumed somewhere along the line gave him a terrible case of intestinal flu. He was not able to make it out of his hotel room over to the ministry of foreign affairs. Here these negotiations were on-going and he was incapacitated. I explained this to our counterparts in the foreign ministry who asked how we were going to get this thing going. I said, "Well, the man can't come. He's sick." I ended up doing shuttle diplomacy between Steve's hotel room where he was confined with diarrhea, comparing notes with him and carrying them back to the ministry of foreign affairs and talking to people on the American affairs desk. It was even to the point where Steve needed a typewriter to type up telegrams, notes, etc., so I ended up taking my portable Olympia typewriter over to Steve's hotel room for his use.



By the end of the week he recovered enough that we could resume negotiations with the Japanese. These negotiations were taking place in January during the last week of the Johnson administration. It was really a bizarre scene. We had to get circular 125 agreement on the draft agreement. We finally did negotiate something that would be accepted by the Japanese and we had to get Washington to agree to it. We had to get that before noon, January 20, 1969, when Johnson's term as president would formally expire. We came right down to the wire on that. Steve and I were in the embassy in Tokyo at 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock at night on the 20th of January as noontime was approaching in Washington, DC carrying out the discussions by telephone. Steve was on one phone talking to Washington and I was on the other phone talking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We were going back and forth trying to settle on final wording so that we could get mutual agreement on both sides that this would be the shape of the Micronesian claims settlement. We managed to do it with, I think, five minutes to spare. We got both parties to agree and we initiated the agreement and later on we got circular 125 authority. I'm not quite sure when that came in. It is a very minor chapter in U.S.-Japan relations but it is one of those bizarre things that happen.

The Japanese did agree to pay \$10 million, although they really didn't like doing it. They stonewalled on this all the way through. We had to drag them. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs got caught between the U.S. embassy and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance simply did not want to cough up the \$10 million at all. They saw no justification for it and the Ministry of Finance is all-powerful in Japan. My counterpart, Kazuo Chiba, who is a very good friend of mine, who I just saw again last August in Japan, was head of the American desk and a very able diplomat. Finally, when he got the Ministry of Finance to agree and called me to notify me of this, he blew up on the phone. He completely lost it and scolded me in the most scathing terms for the way we acted in these negotiations and all the rest. I did not reply in kind. I said to him, "I understand, Kaz, what you are saying. I appreciate what you have done and I know it has been difficult." I think he just hung up. He was angry, frustrated, tired, beaten, bruised and everything else. We never talked about that again. It is not his style and it is not the kind of thing we would do in our relationship. But, I remember very clearly that being a hard fought agreement to bring about.

Q: What was your impression of the Japanese Foreign Service and foreign ministry?



CUNNINGHAM: They were super. I never worked harder in my life then I worked in Tokyo. At the end of three years I was very tired. But in all of these comparisons of batting order that we used to make about international affairs every day when I go over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I never told them anything new that they didn't already know. They knew everything just as quickly as we did. We had different understandings and interpretations and they and we were both interested in knowing what each other thought about any issue at hand. We were kind of confirming each other's analyses and confirming the details with one another. At the end of one of these conversations, I would go back and report to Washington what the Japanese had told me. In other words, it was another perspective on that particular issue. I never surprised them and I'm happy to say they never surprised us either in any of these exchanges, but we always learned something from one another. I came to respect the Ministry of Foreign Affairs very, very highly.

The quality of the diplomatic corps in Tokyo was absolutely first class. We had world class people in all the embassies there. It was a real privilege to work with people in the German embassy, the British embassy, the French and all the rest and even the Soviet embassy, with whom we worked from time to time. They were knowledgeable, able people who were first rate diplomats. So, you get to be a good player by playing with the champions, and it was a great opportunity for me to work in that embassy.

We should talk about Three other things that happened during this period of time. 1.) The meeting of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), for which I was deployed, had nothing to do with Japan but with South Africa; 2.) the hijacking of a Japanese airliner to Korea; and 3.) ping pong diplomacy in which I was involved in 1971, and how that fit into the whole business of China-Japan relations during that time.

The Universal Postal Union meets every five years in a different country. This is a meeting of postmasters from all over the world to discuss the size and shape of envelopes for international standardization and things of that kind. They meet for six or seven weeks. It is a grand extravaganza. Japan was the host country for this meeting in 1970. This was a different period in Japan's postwar development. The Japanese were trying to reestablish themselves in the international order. In the 1960s they had embarked upon Ikeda's double your income policy and that was when the gross domestic product of Japan grew phenomenally and they became major exporters of consumer and other goods. There was also the period of the Olympics in Japan and Expo 70. All of these were carefully planned and programmed events to restore Japan to a position as a respectable member of the international community in all ways. Inviting the Universal Postal Union, one of the oldest intergovernmental organizations, to meet in Japan in Tokyo was another of these moves.



One day in the fall of 1970 we received in the embassy an airgram instruction, a fairly low level communication at that point, saying the Universal Postal Union would be meeting in Tokyo on such-and-such a date and that the Department understood there was going to be a move to expel South Africa and Portugal from the UPU. A delegation would be coming out composed of people from the postal department along with an attorney contracted to the legal affairs office in the Department of State. No, formal State Department people in the delegation. We were to monitor moves to expel South Africa and/or Portugal from the UPU and report. The instructions came to me because I'm the guy handling external affairs in the embassy. I read this thing and said okay.

When the delegation came in, either someone from them contacted the embassy or I went over and contacted somebody at the Tokyo Prince Hotel where they were staying. I said that I was a State Department guy and if you hear anything about this, let me know so that I can report to Washington and they agreed. I think there was a Japanese holiday so nothing happened and they went off on a long weekend. When they got back Sunday night they found a draft resolution had been circulated to all delegations by, I think, Senegal, but I'm not sure. The draft called for expulsion of South Africa and Portugal from the Universal Postal Union in retaliation for the policies of apartheid in South Africa and the colonial and imperialist policies of Portugal in its African colonies, Mozambique and Angola.

I was notified of this and in fact called over to the hotel. There was a group of agitated representatives from places like New Zealand, Australia, etc. who said to me, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I will report this to Washington. Those are my instructions." "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "My instructions are not to do anything but report." They said, "But, you are the leader of the free world, the United States, what are you going to do?" I said, "I will report it."

So, I reported this thing to Washington. The next morning I was over at the hotel where the conference was taking place and was called out of a meeting for a phone call. It was from a guy, either director or deputy director of the UN political office in IO (International Organizations) who said to me, "We got your telegram and we want you to oppose this resolution." I said, "That is not what the instructions that came out from Washington said. We were told not to get out in front on this if it arises but simply to report and I reported." This guy said, "No, you are to oppose this initiative." I said, "But, I have work to do here in the embassy. Why don't you contact the delegation?" "They don't know how to oppose this initiative. So, you are to oppose this initiative." I said, "You are telling me to go out in front?" He said, "Yes, I'm telling you to go out in front." I said, "You had better send out a telegram to that effect because so far as the embassy is concerned I'm just here as a part time observer to report to you what is going on." He said, "Don't worry about that, we will take care of it."



I went back to the meeting and said to the delegation that we were to oppose the initiative. They all looked at me and said, "How do we do that?" Well, thank God, I had been in 1964 deployed by the Department of State as a liaison officer to the U.S. mission to the UN during the period of the General Assembly on behalf of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. So, I had learned from that experience what you have to do in multilateral diplomacy in UN affairs to go about organizing a position on a resolution. So, I set to work to do so. I guess I set up operations in the offices of the delegation in its quarters over at the hotel and worked much of the time from there. For six or seven weeks I was not in the embassy but with this delegation fighting tooth and nail to keep South Africa and Portugal in the UPU. What I did, using my position in the embassy as first secretary, was to energize the whole diplomatic corps in Tokyo to rally around this cause and back us in the Universal Postal Union because most of the delegations did not have professional diplomats with them either. So, I got all of my colleagues in the diplomatic corps involved in this thing.

The first thing we did was to circulate a resolution saying there aren't going to be any political discussions in the Universal Postal Union. Well, the resolution passed but didn't make a damn bit of difference. The non-aligned movement went right ahead with a resolution to expel South Africa from the UPU. We went to the chairman, who was Japanese, and said, "Mr. Chairman, you have to rule this resolution out of order because general council has already adopted a resolution saying there won't be any discussion of political matters." The chairman was not going to act independently on this and said that he would have to consult the Foreign Ministry and would give full consideration of our position on this matter. We said, "Please do." Then we went to work on the Foreign Ministry to try to get them to turn the chairman around. Well, the chairman, of course, came from the Postal Ministry and not from the Foreign Ministry.

The chairman was reluctant to go out on a limb on this kind of thing and the Foreign Ministry was reluctant to jeopardize its relationships with a group of non-aligned countries for the sake of supporting the U.S. on the questionable issue of South Africa's status because of apartheid, etc. I guess they didn't have enough at stake in regard to South Africa to weigh in the balance against their relationships with all the non-aligned countries. And, of course, I think a lot of the other countries were putting pressure on the Foreign Ministry as well to go along with admitting this resolution to debate and discussion.

Well, the upshot was that the chairman did not rule the resolution out of order. So then we were launched on a debate that took over the proceedings of the UPU for the rest of the seven weeks. It came up, then was sent into committee, came up again and sent again into committee, so I was constantly on the run monitoring this thing. Finally, it came to a vote and by one vote the general council voted to expel South Africa from the UPU. I worked as intensively as I could for two days, full time, leading up to this thing lobbying delegations right and left and sending off telegrams to capitals, etc. but to no avail. The resolution passed by a margin of one. I think that the issue of Portugal was split off and Portugal was reprimanded but not expelled.



There was a lot of recrimination over this even in the ensuing sessions after the whole thing was over. It dragged on almost down to the end and took a great deal of my time. It had nothing to do with my regular work in the embassy. There was one instance when a key vote went against us (whether or not to require a two-thirds vote on the resolution) in this process and I had counted every vote very carefully and checked with all kinds of people and I was able, I felt, to account for every vote, but we lost by one vote and a simple majority was sufficient to pass the resolution. I was really peeved by that. I checked all of my tallies and all of the research that I had done and by process of elimination I concluded that it was the French who had switched and voted against us. I shared this with a few other delegations, most particularly my very good friend, Klaus Blech, who was the counselor of the German embassy at the time. I did that deliberately because I believed that it would get back to the French at some point, and it did. A French diplomat came to me protesting right and left that they of course supported our position and would not do otherwise under any circumstances. I felt they were protesting far too much, so I think my analysis was right, although I can't prove it.

Q: The votes were secret?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, I think they were secret. That was an interesting experience.

Q: What were the other points that you were dealing with?

CUNNINGHAM: One of the two issues that we probably should mention was the hijacking of a Japanese domestic passenger flight to Seoul, Korea. Such a thing had not happened in Japan before. I think it was a flight going to Kyushu. I have forgotten who the perpetrator was but this was at a time when Japanese-Korean relations were not of the best. They had established diplomatic relations but against a background of Japan's colonialism in Korea, which the Koreans were very bitter about. And, now, all of a sudden a Japanese domestic flight had been hijacked to Korea by parties unknown. The Japanese had to rely on the Koreans to rectify the situation, capture the perpetrator, whoever he or she was. As it turned out I think it was a Japanese national, but I am not sure now.



In any case, our concern in that was that there were a couple of Americans on board this plane and there was some threat that the plane might be taken to North Korea. This was not long after the Pueblo incident and we certainly didn't need another American hostage in North Korea at that point. So, I spent a lot of time when this happened working with the ministry of foreign affairs, and I have forgotten when this was, I think it was in 1970, to the extent that we could and the Korean embassy and then just monitoring the thing on Japanese television. After its landing, there were Japanese television cameras trained on this aircraft, 24 hours a day broadcasting live on Japanese television. Really one of the most boring experiences that I ever had was watching nothing happening on the tarmac while negotiations went on some place in regard to the release of the passengers on the plane. It could have been a very volatile incident turning out badly, but happily it turned out all right. So, this was something that occupied a lot of my time for a few days.

I was not involved in the Okinawa negotiations at all. A special section was set up in the embassy to handle that. Charles A. (Chuck) Schmitz was the head of that section and he had two or three other people who were working with him and people were deployed out of Washington from time to time. It was a high point of the period.

During this period of time, also of significance in the Japan of 1970, was that the security treaty at that point became eligible for repudiation by either party on one year's notice. When it had been drafted in 1960, there was a 10-year period when it could not be repudiated and then after that could be repudiated by either side. There were demonstrations outside the American embassy nightly during the time that the Diet was in session. And, also outside the Diet. Also, on weekends throughout Tokyo. The students were trying to persuade the Japanese government to repudiate the treaty. The American embassy every evening for weeks was surrounded by Japanese security police with their protective gear on and the big shields that they used to prevent the demonstrators from intruding upon the American embassy compound. All of these things seemed to be somewhat scripted because the demonstrators would snake dance up the hill to the street in front of the embassy and then circulate around and snake dance back down again. They would come within six inches of the police but never touch them.

This was at the time when the Japanese police developed a technique that many other police forces have since adopted. By then the minicam had been invented, so the Japanese police equipped a lot of people with minicams to run along right behind this phalanx of Japanese security police and photograph all of the demonstrators on the other side of the line as they snake danced pass. The police then would then try to use the film as evidence to arrest them later on. Then the demonstrators took to wearing masks disguising themselves so that they could not be photographed. It was all fascinating to watch play out.



Going home from work I would go out the back entrance to the embassy and walk through back alleys to my home, while the whole thing was taking place down the street in front of the embassy. Tokyo was perfectly secure. My parents and friends back home reading about these massive demonstrations that were going on around the American embassy thought that I was in dire peril, but nothing of the kind was happening.

This was also the period when the student uprisings on the campuses began and the campus of Tokyo University and several others were taken over by students for a time. It was kind of a replication of the student movement that erupted in the United States as a result of the Vietnam War. There was a certain amount of anti-Vietnam protesting and protesting against the rigidities of the Japanese education system that were important a background to these student movements. There are two people who you should interview if you haven't done so already about the domestic politics of Japan at that time and implications for relations with the U.S. Those are Francis McNeil, who is a Japan specialist, and who I think lives somewhere around Washington, DC.

Q: I have interviewed Frank but I can't remember how far we got because he sort of drifted away. I think he is up in New Haven now. I will go looking for him.

CUNNINGHAM: And Robert Immerman, who is adjunct professor at Columbia and also at a university in Japan. He rotates on a regular basis between Japan and New York giving courses in both places. Bob is a superb analyst of Japan. With regards to that movement in the domestic politics of the time, those are two guys I would recommend very, very highly.

Q: Perhaps I can get him to come down to Washington for an interview.

CUNNINGHAM: Bill Sherman is someone else who lives in Northern Virginia.

Q: I have interviewed Bill.

CUNNINGHAM: Good. And Rodney Armstrong, who is no longer in the Foreign Service, he is a Washington lobbyist, was in the embassy at that time. Rod is to some extent conversant with the domestic politics.

Q: Where is he now?

CUNNINGHAM: Well, last time I heard he was a lobbyist for Toyota in Washington.



Q: Bill, you mentioned there were two more subjects you wanted to talk about on Japan. One was Ambassador Armin Meyer and the other was ping pong diplomacy.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes. In November, 1968, Richard Nixon was elected president and soon thereafter he chose U. Alexis Johnson, who was currently ambassador to Japan, to become the under secretary of state for political affairs, which at that time was the top foreign service job in the Department of State. So, Johnson left. There is a little story about that too, which should perhaps be mentioned here and I don't know whether it is true or not. Since both of the gentlemen are dead, there is no way of telling, but I heard this story. Marshall Green, who was then assistant secretary for East Asian affairs, wanted the job of ambassador to Japan, and he was U. Alexis Johnson's first choice to be his successor in Tokyo. Some time in late December or early January, before Johnson had left Tokyo to go back to Washington for hearings and to take up his new job, Marshall Green headed out to East Asia on a visit to Vietnam. He did not make a visit to Japan on that trip, but he stopped at Haneda airport for refueling or change of planes or something like that. As a courtesy he called Johnson from the airport. Johnson took the call and was glad to hear from Marshall, the two men knew one another very well. Johnson was waiting for Green to tell him that Green would like the job as Johnson's successor. Green did not bring this up in their telephone conversation. Johnson rather expected that the phone conversation would be about that. Since, Green did not bring it up, Johnson thought with the big change in Washington Green has gotten a better offer from the administration or somewhere else and probably was not at liberty to say anything about it. Therefore, Johnson did not mention the Ambassadorial post to Green, thinking that he had chosen something else and wasn't able to talk about it yet.

Green, on the other hand, did want to be Ambassador to Japan. He was waiting for Johnson to raise the subject. Green didn't want to put Johnson in an awkward position by raising the subject himself, so he waited for Johnson to bring it up. When Johnson did not do so, Green assumed that either someone else had been chosen or that Johnson was in favor of someone else for the job.

So, the telephone conversation went on very cordially and politely and neither man mentioned this question of who was going to be Johnson's successor in Tokyo. Green's flight was called, and he hung up and went on his way.

From there on I don't know how things developed, except I understand there was a list of 20 people who were asked whether they would want to be ambassador to Japan and Armin Meyer was the 20th and all the other 19 said no or had something else, etc.



It is also interesting that just at that time the trade balance between the U.S. and Japan turned around and Armin Meyer became ambassador to Japan in the year when we first went into a negative trade balance with the Japanese. The issue at the time was textiles. Nixon had made a promise to the textile industries in the South that he would make sure that they were protected against imports of foreign textiles. Prime Minister Sato made a visit to Washington soon after the inauguration and Nixon brought the matter up. James Wickel, who was our senior interpreter in the American embassy, a man of unparalleled knowledge of the Japanese language, nuances and inferences, etc., was present in the room where this conversation took place. Nixon said to Sato, who did not speak English, "I have this terrible problem with the textile producers in the South, and I have to protect them. Textile imports from Japan are very large and Mr. Prime Minister you have to do something about this." Sato was one of the most enigmatic of the post war Japanese prime ministers and he said in Japanese, "I will adopt a forward looking position towards this matter." Nixon got the impression from this statement that Sato had committed himself to restraining textile imports from Japan. Sato did not intend to convey that impression at all because he knew it would be a delicate and political matter back home. What he was simply saying, according to the Japanese and Jim Wickel, is "I hear your message, Mr. President," and nothing beyond that.

The two went away from the meeting separately with very different understandings of what had transpired between them. Later on this conversation was revisited by both sides, but by that time Nixon felt he was being double-crossed by the Japanese and when Nixon got that kind of idea there really wasn't much you could do to redeem yourself. Sato, on the other hand, was having to defend himself from attacks from the Diet as a result of things that were coming out of Washington over the trade balance question.

Sato, was famous for making statements of all kinds that were subject to many different interpretations and it was common in the American embassy after Sato had made an important statement in the Diet for all of our Japanese language experts, including Jim Wickel, to sit down and pore over this statement and try to figure out what Sato really meant because it sounded like he meant one thing but it could mean that he meant something else. Then they would consult with political circles in Japan and with Sato's interpreters. Sato's statements always left a great deal of vagueness in the atmosphere and, of course, left him a lot of latitude.



Armin Meyer was a big change in the style of the American embassy in comparison to U. Alexis Johnson. Meyer had never been in East Asia at all. He was an Arabist and Middle East expert, and evidently a very good one. His personal style was entirely different. Whereas U. Alexis Johnson's style was "you guys take care of things, you are professionals, let me know if you need me," Armin Meyer was an activist and wanted to get into everything. Coming from the Middle East where if you want something done you see the King of Jordan, or the Shah of Iran or somebody else who is a maximum leader and tell them what your problem is and the matter is taken of, Meyer had great difficulty understanding the Japanese system, which does not work that way at all. Formally, in structural terms from the outside it looks as though it ought to work the way formal hierarchical systems do. But the Japanese system of governing is difficult to understand, and definitely more difficult to know how to influence than most. When Washington started giving Meyer a lot of heat about the trade balance, he figured he should go and talk to the emperor. This would have been absolutely useless and embarrassing to all sides concerned had he done it. He had to be dissuaded from this.

Armin Meyer was not an easy person to dissuade once he got the idea that something had to be a certain way. He was vocally, militantly anti-Communist. He had a very doctrinaire manner about things. He polarized the embassy soon after he got there. His style clashed directly with the way things are done in Japan, which is by hint, inference, nuance, by being somewhat indirect and conscious of face, etc. Armin Meyer's style did not fit with that at all. He really set the teeth on edge of most people who had to deal with him on a daily basis. I must say also that his wife added to this impression very much because she was a staunch defender of Ambassador Meyer. She was vocal about how the ambassador had the right answer to everything and very conscious of her position as the first lady of the American embassy and community and wanted to make certain nobody had any mistake about that at all. This did not endear her to anybody in the official diplomatic community there. In fact, a lot of people just went out of their way to avoid her all together if they possibly could.

The thing about Meyer that interested me very much was his enigmatic personality. He would make the most outrageous kinds of statements in the privacy of his office, in the privacy of his bubble, where we held the senior staff meetings in the embassy. "I am going to speak to the Japanese Press Club next week and tell such-and-such." People would be just horrified at what Armin Meyer wanted to say publicly to the Japanese. They would hold their heads, wring their hands. It fell to Bill Sherman as political counselor most of the time, and to Dick Sneider the rest of the time I think, to go and say to the ambassador, "Now, this isn't the way it is done in Japan." Sneider, somehow or other managed to survive this experience in reasonably good fashion, but Bill Sherman to this day can not think of Armin Meyer without his stomach turning over. The memory is really anathema to Bill.



I was not that much directly involved with Armin Meyer because he didn't deal a great deal with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I didn't have to worry much about him but would get the ricochets from his actions and statements from all of my colleagues. The interesting thing about Armin Meyer is that in private and in the conference room in the embassy he would make statements about Japan and Japan's policy toward the United States that went completely against the many delicate, and finely balanced precepts of U.S. Japan relations. These statements greatly alarmed his entire staff. But you put Armin Meyer on stage and somehow or either he managed to say exactly the right thing every time. It would come out the right way. Perhaps his blatant adversarial style was a learning method. Armin Meyer did have a very good sense for public relations. His personal persona, however, seemed to be that of Babbitt straight out of Main Street in his behavior, style and speech privately. But, you put him in the diplomatic context where he had to perform and somehow or other he would switch this all around and put it across very smoothly. I saw this happen time and again. Every time this happened my colleagues in the embassy were saying, "I can't figure this out. How did that come about?" They were not able to comprehend whatever it was and I can't either, the transformation in Armin Meyer. Maybe it was that he was just letting off steam in the privacy of the embassy, steeling himself to do what he personally did not want to do but knew he had to do because he was the American ambassador and a career diplomat.

The other thing about Armin Meyer is that he took extremely good care of congressional delegations and political visitors of all kinds. Anytime there was a CODEL coming in that was a major event so far as Armin Meyer was concerned. It was more important than the way we treated any minister of the Japanese cabinet. He made sure that everything went just right for them. That built him very strong relationships in Washington, DC.

I got along all right with Meyer and in fact he gave me a meritorious service award for my work on the Universal Postal Union. I was quite surprised that he did that. He congratulated me on it. I said, "Well, I didn't succeed, Mr. Ambassador, we lost by one vote." He said, "I know it is tough to lose those votes, but you worked awfully hard and did a good job with what you had to work with and you deserve this award." I felt that was very generous of him and was it nothing that I anticipated whatsoever. Somehow or other I seemed to get along with him all right. I don't in anyway discount or deprecate the work of my colleagues in the American embassy. It was just one of those things where for unknown reasons the chemistry worked for me with Armin Meyer, although I was on edge a lot of the time dealing with him as well.



Now, to come to ping pong diplomacy. This background of Meyer's personality and behavior is part of the story. In the fall of 1970 it became obvious that U.S. policy was on the slippery slope so far as maintaining the representation of the Republic of China in the UN General Assembly. The end was visible, particularly to me because of all the time I had spent working on this matter six and seven years previously when I was on the Republic of China desk. We prevailed in the general assembly 1970 by a very narrow margin, but the tide had been running against it for some years and this was visible evidence that it was going to shift. So, we and the Japanese began consulting on this. In fact, the U.S. began consulting with a lot of people in various places very quietly about what shall we do, what is our fallback, what are the alternatives? Should the Republic of China be encouraged to resign from the United Nations thereby removing China all together from the language of the United Nations and entitlement to a seat on the Security Council as a permanent member? All kinds of scenarios were discussed. Even the scenario of a two China solution of some kind, which was anathema to Taipei. We had a number of rehearsals of this with the ministry of foreign affairs in Tokyo and several conferences. Some people came out from Washington to conduct a roundtable discussion of some kind, a bull session with the foreign ministry along about February or March 1971.

Also, coincidentally, during that time, I made a month long trip in January to Australia. The International Congress of Orientalists was holding a meeting in Canberra, Australia. This is a conclave of all the people who specialize in Asian studies from all around the world. It is a venerable organization that goes back to the 19th century. I had attended a session of the Congress that was the first one to be held in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1967, when I was at Columbia. I thought this was a neat organization, they were meeting in Canberra, and I had never been to Australia. I decided that I would like to attend the Congress and present a paper on the manuscript that I had done while at Columbia University on sabbatical in 1967. My topic was Chinese Communist Party attitudes towards the United Nations up until the time of liberation in 1949 and the Security Council vote on Korea in December 1950. My proposal was accepted. I got a conference rate on an airline ticket and worked out a lot of things and flew to Canberra about January 3. I also wanted to take advantage of this trip to visit other places in Southeast Asia and was gone about a month. I went to the Philippines, where I had never been, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, etc.



Two interesting things happened on that trip. One was when I presented my paper at Canberra. We knew from Foreign Service reporting that the Romanian consul general in Sydney at that time was a well-known China specialist who had served in Beijing. We were interested in his views of what was going on in China. Romania was one of the countries that Nixon was cultivating and thinking about using as a channel to China, although none of us knew that at the time. It turned out that this consul general's wife was in the audience when I gave my paper and she had been with him when he was in Beijing and was to some extent a China scholar in her own right. She was interested in my paper and we had a little conversation about it afterwards. She and some others were interested in whether or not this was some kind of a signal that we were sending to the Chinese, since it was the first secretary from the American embassy in Tokyo who was presenting the paper? Well, it was no signal, but on the other hand since I was a China watcher and specialist, I was not averse to taking advantage of any opportunity that came along to use my little paper as a vehicle for having broader discussions about China. The Romanian lady invited me to visit her and her husband in Sydney after the Congress. When I got to Sydney, I called the Romanian Consulate, but I was not able to make contact with the Consul General or his wife, so no conversation ensued.

On the way back to Tokyo from that conference I stopped in Taipei. Walter McConaughy was the American ambassador to the Republic of China at that time and Bill Thomas was the DCM. I went around to the Foreign Ministry to see my old friend, Yang His-k'un, the Vice Minister who had for so long worked so hard in Africa for so long to retain support for China's representation in the United Nations. He welcomed me and we had a long conversation in his office, during which he said, "You know, this situation in the General Assembly is a real worry to us and the vote is getting awfully close and we are not quite sure what to do. We have to think of something. You know, if someone at the level of the U.S. vice president [who was Spiro Agnew at the time] could propose or float the idea of two seats for China in the general assembly as a way of addressing the problem that is coming up, that would open up this alternative for discussion here in Taiwan." I believe that Agnew was to make a visit to Asia a few weeks later, and Yang's idea was that Agnew would raise the idea in the course of his trip. I was quite surprised that Yang made this statement. Of course, he was talking to me as a friend. I was not from the embassy or on any official business. I had just dropped in to see an old friend. We had about a half-hour of conversation.



I immediately went back to the American embassy and saw Bill Thomas and said, "This is what vice minister Yang His-k'un said to me," and Bill said, "Let's go in and see the ambassador about this." So, we went into the ambassador's office and he said, "Mr. Ambassador, Bill Cunningham has been over to see his old pal vice minister Yang." McConaughy knew who I was and said, "Yes. Tell me what he said." So, I recounted the whole thing. McConaughy said, "We have to report this right away. This is a very important conversation, Bill. I am very glad you came back to tell us about this." The interesting thing about that was that McConaughy did not resist the idea at all. Now, you know, I've earlier described how we in the China crowd used to speak about the policy of the three Walters-Walter Judd, Walter Robertson and Walter McConaughy -all hard-line supporters of the Nationalists and resolute opponents of the Chinese Communists. So, it was quite surprising to me that Walter McConaughy was receptive to the idea of a two China maneuver in the general assembly as a way of saving the position of the Republic of China in the United Nations and addressing this problem - - surprising because it would mean a radical departure from the official ideology of the Nationalists and entry for the Chinese Communists onto the world stage. .

So, that telegram went off to the Department of State. I think as a matter of fact Bill Thomas asked me to sit down and dictate it to Sally Smith, his secretary at the time and another able Foreign Service trouper who had served with other China specialists and me from Tokyo to Singapore. I dictated the cable, and then Bill signed off on it. Of course, by the time I got back to Tokyo, everyone in the Embassy everyone was asking questions about what I had been doing being gone a month and then monkeying around in China policy. My answer was that I was just visiting an old friend. After I got back to Tokyo people came out from Washington and the buzz was what are we going to do about China in the United Nations, etc. So, that was what I was focusing on. This brings us to the 7th of April 1971. Three o'clock in the afternoon I am sitting in my office when the phone rings. It is a telephone call from Frank Donovan, now deceased, who was the press officer in USIS. Donovan said to me, "Bill, the Italian press agency has just moved the story to the effect that the PRC table tennis team playing in the international matches in Nagoya has invited the U.S. table tennis team to visit China." I said, "Yes." Frank said, "Well, we are going to be asked about this. What should we say?" I said, "Frank, just tell them we know about it." He said, "That is not enough. We've got to say more." By this time something had begun to percolate in my mind and I said, "Okay, Frank, tell them we know about it and that if they decide to go it will not be against United States policy." I stopped and started to say, "Well, we can elaborate that a little bit." And Frank said, "That is enough. We don't need to say anymore." I said, "Okay," and hung up.



Then I thought to myself, "I better be able to back this up. I know I have seen something in print somewhere to this effect and I think I am sure of my ground." I started looking around and found in my bookshelf the statement I was looking for. It was in the annual report on the foreign relations of the United States from the President to the Congress. This is a series that Kissinger started up when he was the National Security Advisor, and there are three or four volumes in that series, one for each year of Kissinger's tenure. The Department of State put out a parallel report, a thicker and more detailed report also for each of the same years after the presidential reports started coming out. Well, there in the report of the President to the Congress was the statement that the United States is open to educational, cultural and athletic exchanges with the Peoples Republic of China. Just one sentence to that affect. I thought, there it is. Table tennis is a sport, an athletic event, and we have said that it is okay to have exchanges with them. They have invited the American team, and there is no policy reason why it shouldn't go. I was right. Then, as I further looked at this I thought, "Well, you know, I hadn't really focused on this sentence before." I then recalled the pheasant egg exchange I spoke of earlier. I thought to myself that my colleagues back there on the mainland China desk in the Department of State have been working away in incremental fashion to develop language that would open the door just a little more to contact with China, and had finally managed to get this short sentence inserted into a high level statement of the U.S. government. This was the sort of thing that the desk would try to do to gradually and more or less below the radar to open up channels and opportunities for communication with the PRC." That is all I thought it was at the time. I had no knowledge of anything that Henry Kissinger was doing through back channels with Yahya Khan, the president of Pakistan.

Okay, I had just found this statement and hadn't even sat down at my desk yet when the phone rang again. It was Alan Carter, who was the public affairs officer in Tokyo. Carter said, "Frank told me about his conversation with you and what you said." I said, "Yes." Carter said, "Don't you think you have gone awfully far?" I had the text in front of me by now, and I read the sentence to him. He said, "I don't know about that. It has gone very far." I said, "Alan, this is an official, public statement of United States policy." By this time I was getting a little bit assertive about this because having found this sentence I couldn't see any basis for the Embassy to issue a statement saying the team can't go or throwing cold water on that. It would be the wrong thing to do and would be denying the validity of a statement of the government and that would send the wrong signal to the Chinese. I said, "I think this is what we should say. Here it is. It's a public statement. How are you going to go against that?" Well, Carter said to me, "You had better talk to the ambassador." I said, "Okay, I'll go talk to the ambassador."



So, I hung up and started out my office down the corridor to the ambassador's office. I walked in and said to his secretary, "Is the ambassador free? I have something I want to ask him about." She said, "Oh, you might as well go on in, everybody else is in there." I thought this was a rather strange statement but went on in. The ambassador's office was a room at least 50 feet in length. It had been the formal waiting room when the embassy was built and the secretary's office had been the ambassador's office. But the rooms had been switched around at some point. Ambassador Meyer was standing behind his desk at the far end of the room just hanging up the telephone as I walked in. Seated in a corner to my right on a couch were two full bird colonels of the United States Army, both in full uniform. The two colonels looked up, startled by my bursting into the ambassador's office. They looked at me, then looked at him. I started to say something to the Ambassador and he said, with more than a hint of exasperation in his voice, "All right, go ahead and put out the statement." I said, "Okay," and turned to leave the office. As I was going out the door, I heard Meyer almost shout "And, you know what you might do when you put it out is ask why they don't invite the Republic of China too. A bunch of damn Communists." I said, "Yes, thank you, sir," walked out, and closed the door.

I never asked Alan Carter, at least I don't recall asking him, but I assume that I no sooner walked out of my office than Carter called the ambassador to tell him before I got there what was going on. I never had the opportunity at that moment to discuss this matter with Ambassador Meyer at all. Walking down to his office, I must confess that I was a little bit apprehensive about what he might say and how I was going to present this thing to him. So, I was quite taken back by his response.

Not only that, Meyer's comment about inviting the ROC players to the Mainland reflected an awareness of a controversy in Nagoya over the participation of the Chinese teams in the table tennis championships. The Japanese were hosting this event and the PRC players wanted to attend, and I recently have found out that the Japanese wanted the PRC to attend because the Chinese were the world champions, and if they didn't attend the matches would be a dud. Again, this was 1971 and the Japanese were trying to promote their position internationally and they did not want to have a table tennis match that was going to be a flop, meaningless because the world champions were not present. So, they had made a demarche to the Chinese to encourage them to attend. But, I didn't know any of this at the time. I did know that when the PRC indicated that they would attend, that then the question of the attendance of the ROC team became an issue. The ROC team, which had been invited, was then dis-invited from the matches and did not attend. I knew this subliminally, but I hadn't been paying any attention to it. Meyer apparently was clued in to all of this and was familiar with it. How, I don't know and I am going to have to ask him about that because I am now getting back to doing research on this episode.



So, I walked out of the Ambassador's office and back to my office and sat down waiting for the phone to ring. I waited for somebody to call and say that such-and-such a paper had noticed this story and wanted to know the position of the United States government, etc. Nothing happened. Nobody called. I was expecting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to call up to ask what we were going to say. I finally called Frank and asked if any of the press had called. I think he told me no, nothing has happened. Then I began to worry a little bit. I thought that when this thing bursts I want to make sure that we get the line out that I have authored and has been approved by the Ambassador, because it was beginning to dawn on me that it would be important in terms of the relationship with the PRC. In other words, I didn't want the PRC to get a negative answer on this because that would cut against the public statements that had been made by the White House and the Department. I didn't want somebody who was uninformed responding to this question either. So long as it was a business day and we were in session we could be pretty sure the question would go to the right place and the answer would come out right, but beyond that I didn't know. Only four people, Ambassador Meyer, Alan Carter, Frank Donovan, and I knew and had agreed how to respond.

Also time was running and I began to realize I had better get a report to Washington on this, but at that point it was a non-story. There was a press report that was available to Washington DC through FBIS to the effect that an invitation had been extended which begged the question of what the response had been or would be and I had nothing to report in that regard. I couldn't even report that we had been asked and had said something which would more or less set the tone for this matter. So, I was in a bit of a dilemma. The day ended, people went home, I was working late cleaning off my desk. About 6:30 Bob Immerman walked into my office and handed me a slip of paper and said, "Call this telephone number and ask for this person." I said, "What is this all about?" He said, "Just a minute ago I was walking out of the embassy, crossing the lobby and the marine guard was muttering something about people wanting to go to China." Now, Immerman had known what had been going on during the afternoon. That word had gotten around because I had informed the other people in the political section as to what was happening. So, it was sort of the buzz in that part of the embassy at the time. And, I guess Sneider was aware of it also. Nobody had told me boo except Alan Carter who said he thought I was going awfully far.

So Immerman heard this marine guard was muttering something about people going to China. (Parenthetically, I should note that at that time the marine guard was not encased in a bulletproof pillbox in the middle of the chancery entrance. He sat behind a desk to one side of the lobby, and his mutterings were perfectly audible to anyone walking across the lobby.) Immerman went over and asked the marine what this was all about. He said, "Oh, some guy called up and wants to go to China and was looking for the duty officer. I gave him the number." Immerman said, "Did you get the man's name and telephone number?" The fellow said, "Yes." Immerman said, "Write it on a piece of paper." The marine did and handed it to Immerman who brought it up to me.



I called that number in Nagoya and got Graham Steenhoven, who was at the time the President of the U.S. Table Tennis Association. I told him who I was. He said, "Thank God you called. I have been trying to reach the American embassy and I can't get a hold of anybody. We got an invitation to go to China and I want to know whether or not it would be against U.S. policy for us to accept." He said he was barricaded in his hotel room, and the team was outside excitedly pounding on the door. I said, "Mr. Steenhoven, I am aware of the press report that you had gotten the invitation, and if we are asked by the press, this is what we will say." I repeated to him what I had told Frank Donovan. I read the two statements to him. He said, "You are saying that we should go." I said, "No, I am not saying that you should go. You are private American citizens and it is up to you to make up your minds for yourselves as to what you are going to do. You make the decision. I am not making it for you. The U.S. government is not going to tell you what to do about this. What I am saying is that the U.S. government has said that we are open to athletic exchanges with the Peoples Republic of China." He said, "Okay. It won't be against U.S. policy if we go." I said, "No, it will not." He said, "Thank you very much and hung up."

Then I called Armin Meyer at his residence and said, "Mr. Ambassador, I have just now talked with Mr. Steenhoven, President of the U.S. Table Tennis Association, in Nagoya." I started to tell him more when the Ambassador interrupted and said, "Bill, can you speed this up, I'm late for a reception." I said, "Okay, Mr. Ambassador, this is the bottom line. I read him the statements and he said, 'If they go it is not against U.S. policy?' and I said, 'That's right.'" Meyer said, "Fine. Call Al Jenkins in Washington." Alfred LeSesne Jenkins was the Director of Mainland China Affairs at the time. It later turned out that Al Jenkins as a foreign service inspector had inspected Armin Meyer in Teheran and the two of them had hit it off very well and Meyer knew that Jenkins was the China desk officer. I said, "Mr. Ambassador it is early in Washington, they are not at work yet." He said, "Call him anyway." I said, "Okay."



So, I called Jenkins. I called the Department of State's operation center and as I was doing so I thought that this is going out over the international telephone net and everybody will pick it up. The Japanese will pick it up. Do we want that? Well, we want them to know in some way or other and this is kind of a face saving way for them to find out and maybe they will call me so that I can tell them what is going on. I wasn't going to take the initiative to call anybody in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and tell them what we were doing. That would look like we were pushing it and I didn't think we should give that kind of a signal. I will come back to this in a minute. Then I thought the Russians are going to find out about it for sure, but that is okay. We don't mind if they know that we are getting closer to the PRC. In fact it has been part of our policy over the last few years to exploit differences between the Soviets and the PRC. And then I thought, well will the PRC know about it, hear about it? Well, maybe and maybe not, depending on their technology. But, if they do so much the better because they will know that we are positive to this idea. Then I wondered if the ROC would find out about it. I thought maybe they will because they have good enough technology by now that they can and if they do, so much the better also because it saves us the pain of breaking the news to them out of the blue. So, I saw no reason not to make this phone call, which I did.

The operations center answered and I told them that I wanted to speak to Alfred Jenkins who is head of the China desk. The fellow said to me, "Sir, you know it is 5 o'clock in the morning in Washington and he is at home." I said, "Yes, I do know that." He said, "You want us to wake him up?" I said, "Yes, I do want you to wake him up." He said, "Okay," and patched me over to Al Jenkins home phone out on MacArthur Blvd somewhere in DC. The phone rang and rang and rang for a long time. This was in the era before answering machines. I'm not sure what would have happened had one of those devices been attached to Al's phone.

Finally a very sleepy but recognizable voice answered the phone. I said, "Al, this is Bill Cunningham in Tokyo." He said, "Yes. It is early morning here." I said, "I know. The PRC has invited the American table tennis team to visit China after playing in the championships in Nagoya." He said, "Yes." I said, "Ambassador Meyer wanted me to call you and tell you about this." He said, "Yes." I said, "I have talked to the head of the table tennis association and told him that if they decided to accept the invitation it will not be in violation of U.S. policy." Al said, "That sounds about right," and hung up.



I thought to myself, "My God, he doesn't know what I said. He hasn't gotten it because he very clearly hung up without reacting to the most important event in U.S. China relations since the Warsaw talks began." So, I thought now what do I do? Do I call him back? I was very worried because Jenkins would go into the office, and any telegram that I send or press report that gets there is going to be waiting for him when he arrives. His telephone is going to be ringing off the hook and all kinds of people are going to be asking him what the hell is going on. The White House is going to be after him. At this time I was still thinking of Richard Nixon and the White House in the anti-Communist hard-line mode. I didn't know about the Kissinger back channel thing and I hadn't really focused on the "Foreign Affairs" article Nixon wrote in 1967 either. I assumed that this news was headed toward an environment where it would be welcomed only on the Mainland China desk, and only there would there be people who could manage the implications and repercussions in constructive fashion. This all sounds very peculiar thirty years later, but the political atmosphere in the Washington of the Vietnam era was highly charged and volatile with respect to dealings with any of the communist countries.

I was really concerned now, but I figured I had to prepare a telegram to send out to report. Then it suddenly dawned on me that Herb Levin, who had worked with me and was my China colleague, now was on the national security council staff in Washington. So I called Washington again and asked to be patched over to Herb Levin's home. I got Herb who was fully awake, in fact finishing his breakfast and soon to go out the door to get in the White House car to go to work. I told him what was going on and he said, "Hah!" Great! Send your telegram, mark it this way, say this, say that, and I will take care of everything at this end of the line." So, I said, "Okay, that's great."

I called my wife to say I was going to be late that evening and prepared my telegram. By this time everybody had left. I was alone in the offices, the secretaries had gone, etc. It was before optical character scanners for transmitting telegrams had come in so I prepared to type up the telegram on a green telegram form neatly enough so that the guys in the code room could encrypt it. I set to work preparing what turned out to be the first of several telegrams that evening. I was working on the first one and all of a sudden here appeared my wife in the office with my supper. When she came in I told her what was going on and she was excited and thrilled to hear about it but I told her we couldn't talk about this to anyone. We have to keep it to ourselves. She, of course, is very trustworthy and discreet.



So, I prepared my telegram and it seems to me there were two or three that I sent that evening and I can't recall why I was sending that many and included the whole circuit Hong Kong, Taipei, Moscow, London, where we had a China watch, Paris and a few other places and sent this thing off slugged for Washington in the way Herb had told me to send it. I think I may have sent more than one. I think I sent one just to say that there was a press report and that we were going to respond in a certain way based upon the statements in the president's report and the secretary of state's report because that was more or less kind of an open unclassified sort of thing. The press report and the statements were unclassified and our response would become unclassified anyway so there is no reason to make that highly classified. I also wanted to be sure that the line we had decided upon in Tokyo (and by then with Herb Levin in the White House also) would get the widest possible distribution and thus become the governing statement for all U.S. sources. Then I did a more in-depth, classified report on my conversation with Steenhoven in Nagoya.

I had given Steenhoven my telephone numbers and told him to call me any time if he needed any help. It may have been that evening that he called back and said, "Well, now, if we go to China, accept their invitation, they are going to expect a reciprocal invitation from the United States. Can we invite them to come to the United States and tell them they will be able to come?" I said, "Well, that's a problem. I will have to put that one up to Washington." Steenhoven was a very experienced man and had been in international table tennis activities for a long time and he was aware of the section of the McCarran Act, at that time the governing version of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act. It required a prior clearance by the Department of Justice of anyone coming from a Communist country to the United States to verify that it would be in the national interest to admit this person and would not represent a threat to the security of the United States, or something to that effect. So, I knew you couldn't invite anybody from one of these countries to come to the U.S. unless prior approval had been obtained from the Department of Justice. Well, how do you get prior approval from the Department of Justice if we hadn't told the Chinese yet that we were going to accept their invitation and in return invite them to the U.S. So, I said, "I cannot tell you that they indeed will be admitted to the U.S. if you extend an invitation. I understand the issue here, but I do not have the authority to answer your question. I will put it to Washington." So, another telegram to Washington.



Finally, about midnight I managed to get home and went to sleep. At three o'clock in the morning my telephone rang and it was Al Jenkins now fully alert saying, "We got your telegrams in here and we understand the problem concerning reciprocation and are working on them. We will be getting something out to you but we wanted to let you know that this will be managed." I guess he asked me a few questions and I said, "Okay. Thanks for telling me." I didn't know that I really needed to know this at 3 o'clock in the morning, but I didn't complain; Al Jenkins, now deceased, was a decent fellow. In the morning then, about six or seven o'clock, either I got a phone call from Steenhoven or I called him. I think I called him at his hotel in Nagoya and told him that I had heard from Washington. That they were aware of the invitation and concurred in what I had told him and that they were also aware of the problem of the reciprocal invitation and this matter would be worked upon during the day and I expected to have fresh news later on. I asked him where could I get a hold of him. He said, "Okay. Thank you very much." He was excited about all of this.

I got myself to the office and I think sometime that day a suitably worded instruction came in from Washington with regard to the matter of clearance in advance of the invitation of unknown people who might be coming to the United States to play table tennis with Americans. I passed that information on to Steenhoven. In other words, giving him the green light to go ahead and extend the invitation, he wouldn't be embarrassed, somehow we will work this thing out.

Then I started getting telephone calls. I was asked by the Foreign Ministry, Hiroshi Hashimoto, who was the head of the China desk at that time, if this was a change in our foreign policy towards China. I said, "No, it is not a change in U.S. policy. Our policy has been publicly stated for some months." In other words, you guys should have been doing your homework; here it is in an open text. So, when the invitation came from the PRC side it was obvious that the American table tennis team was completely free to accept the invitation and as a matter of fact I spoke with them and told them it was their decision as private American citizens whether they should go or not. We are not telling them what to do. Well, I was questioned up and down by the Foreign Ministry several times that day about this statement.



Then, of course, the press began to call and in particular Bernard Krisher, who at that time was the "Newsweek" bureau chief in Tokyo. We got into a whole lengthy discussion of U.S.-China relations over the last 20-25 years. Bernie, who is a very good personal friend, was trying to get me on the record. He wanted to quote me by name. I said, "No, you can't quote me by name." "Well, then on background a U.S. government official?" I said, "No, I won't agree to that either." "Well, senior foreign affairs observer?" I said, "That's okay." My reasoning was this. I did not want in any way to identify at that point official representatives of the U.S. government with the response the table tennis team was giving to the Chinese. My fear was that the Chinese might think that it was some sort of a put up job in some way to lure them into a relationship that they did not want. At that point I did not know what the PRC wanted. I didn't know the background of this invitation. I had no way of evaluating it. I didn't know its significance and I didn't want to scare them off and spoil the opportunity. I felt we had made this statement and said we were open to it for the purpose of precisely broadening contact with them and opening something up. I thought that if the PRC got the impression that we had put the U.S. table tennis team up to it in some way or even encouraged them in any way, the Chinese would back off.

One has to understand the context of the time. After all, the Vietnam War was at its height and there was an extremely bitter relationship between the U.S. and China over the Vietnam War. The Warsaw Talks had been suspended for over a year. There was almost total non-communication between the two sides and there was an antagonistic atmosphere. The UN representation question was on the downhill. So, we were operating in very uncertain waters at that point and I didn't want to do anything to disturb matters. I was very careful to avoid any sort of official identification with what the table tennis team was doing. I wanted to make it appear entirely and completely a private initiative. Bernie Krisher has been to this day that I would not allow him to quote me by name because it tended to spoil his story. He reminds me of this every time I see him. But, that is okay, he is a good friend. And, of course, the foreign diplomatic corps began coming around and asking me what was going on.

Then I realized that none of these people on the table tennis team has ever been to China and they don't know what to expect. I thought to myself, I have to talk to them and give them some kind of a briefing. They may just think they are going to play table tennis over there. They don't understand the significance of this trip. They don't understand that they are going to be the first group of Americans to get into the PRC for a very long time. Somewhere along the line I contacted Steenhoven or he contacted me, and I said, "By the way, we will have to validate your passports for travel to the Peoples Republic of China because you have a prohibition in your passports for travel there." He said, "Yes, we are aware of that." I said, "I would appreciate it if the passports could be brought around to the American embassy in Tokyo before you leave." They were going to have to come back to Tokyo in order to leave for China via Hong Kong. We made a date and he said that they would come in around 10:00 on Friday morning to bring the passports to be validated. That was a way of getting them into the embassy, again ostensibly of their own volition, and for me to have the chance to talk to them about the trip to China.



Somebody in the embassy said to me, "Aren't you going to go down to the gate and meet them?" I said, "No. Why go to the gate and meet them? That makes it appear as if the U.S. government was pushing this thing publicly and that is not what we want to do because I don't know how the Chinese are going to react to it." As you may know the consular section of the embassy was down the street, two blocks away from the chancery up on the hill. Ordinarily, somebody who wants to get his passport validated would not have come to the chancery at the top of the hill; they would have gone to the consular office two blocks down the street. But, I had carefully instructed Steenhoven to come up to the chancery. Someone said to me, "Why are they coming here on consular business? Why not send them to the consular section?" I said that I wanted an excuse for them to come to the compound so that I can see them privately and without having to go down there. We can get a consular officer to come up here to do whatever has to be done. I was under the assumption that something formal would be done to validate these passports for travel to the Peoples Republic of China. There might be a seal attached and a signature of some kind, statement or what not. Well, somebody did come up from the consular section with a felt pen and just crossed out words "those parts of China under the control of the Communist Party" and did not initial it or put a seal on the passport. Anyone could have done the same thing without coming into the American embassy. That was a bit of a let down but somewhat beside the point.

Steenhoven was shown up to my office together with a man by the name of Rufford Harrison, who was the U.S. delegate to the International Table Tennis Federation. They came into my office and sat down. I had one hour only to talk with them about this event and explain the significance of it to them. The first half hour was entirely consumed in responding to their questions about logistics of the trip -how they would be treated, how to conduct themselves, etc. - completely off the political subject all together. I was impatient to tell them, "Look, you guys are embarking upon a mission that is of very high importance to the United States and to our relationship with China." So, we discussed for a half-hour these mundane things about the food, water, hotels, shots, diseases, etc. I answered them as best I could. They were particularly concerned because it was after all toward the end of the Cultural Revolution and there were a lot of very visible manifestations of anti-Americanism in China and they were afraid of being attacked in some way by the Chinese. They didn't know how they would be treated. I said, "Look, you would not have been invited if they wanted to abuse you. You are going to be very well taken care of. The PRC has an excellent record of being extremely hospitable to anyone whom it invites and this is in effect an official invitation because sports in the PRC are under the control of the ministry of sports of the government. I think you will have a very enjoyable time." They were much relieved by this.



The American press corps, there were only a few in Tokyo at the time - John Rich of NBC, who was an old timer, a veteran reporter in Asia and knew the area very well, and, I think Bernie Krisher and one other correspondent - wanted to talk to these two before they left. I saw no problem with this if they were amenable to being interviewed by the press and Frank Donovan actually brought John Rich up to the second floor of the embassy. He was in the corridor just outside my office. So, when I finished talking to Steenhoven and Harrison there was sort of a handoff to John Rich. They went out the door and he took them to be interviewed some place else after which they left immediately for the airport to meet up with the rest of the delegation and to have a lunch with their Chinese hosts before boarding a plane to fly to Hong Kong and enter China.

In the conversation with me, Steenhoven said, "You know, they are going to give us gifts when we get over to China and we have to have something to give them in return. We haven't got anything. We have handed out all the souvenirs that we brought with us at the tournament down in Nagoya. Can you help us in any way? We don't even know what they might like." I thought a minute. At that time ballpoint pens were a big deal in China and if you could have an American-made ballpoint pen that was really great. Steenhoven and Harrison were thinking of going out and buying something in Japanese shops somewhere. I said, "No, no, no. You want to have something that is American to give to them. Something that has an American brand name on it. That would be very significant because they haven't got anything like that in there." "Where are we going to find that sort of thing?" I said, "Wait a minute." I called up the administrative officer of the embassy and said, "Danny, we have to get all of the American trademark ballpoint pens we can find anywhere in the Tokyo region to send with a group of people who are going China." I gave him a brief explanation and asked if he could take care of that. He said, "I will handle it." I said, "Okay. I will send somebody to pick these things up and deliver them to the delegation." So, I told Steenhoven that we would have ballpoint pens for him and I think there was something else I thought of too, but I can't remember what it was now.

Danny wanted to deliver these ballpoint pens to me to take to the delegation out at the airport. I said that I couldn't do that because we didn't want an American official doing this and I would have to find someone else to do it. So I called our number one Japanese assistant in the political section to my office and said, "I have something that I want you to deliver to the American table tennis team that is going to China. Go down to the administrative office and pick up a package that will be there for you and take it to J. Graham Steenhoven who is president of the U.S. Table Tennis Association. You will find him either at the Tokyo Prince Hotel or out at Haneda airport in the passenger lounge or some place like that." He said, "Okay." He didn't ask me too many questions about what was going on although he had a rather knowing look. Off he went.



The follow up to that story is that it was just before Easter and I heard from some source later on that there were complaints all over the Tokyo region that no ballpoint pens were available in any of the post exchanges or navy commissaries. Then the storm really broke and everybody was after me to find out what was going on. The press, the Japanese Foreign Ministry were calling me. We were monitoring the Japanese press reports of what was going on with the table tennis team in China as well as the Chinese press reports. We were reporting all of this stuff. The American reporters all asked to go with the American table tennis team but they were not able to get permission from the Chinese and were terribly disappointed. The American press corps in Hong Kong had a similar turndown. Meanwhile the whole Japanese press corps managed to get into China and follow these people. Krisher was very smart. He had somebody on his staff who was Japanese but fluent in Chinese and managed to get him to go along. Therefore, Krisher was getting first hand reports back from China, which he then used to scoop every other American publication.

The team was in China a week and then came out traveling from Hong Kong back through Tokyo on its way back to the U.S. Before the team had left for China, Kissinger sent out a top secret instruction to the consulate general Hong Kong that told them to stay away from these people going into China and departing China. The consulate general and my good friends there were all geared up to interview these people going in and coming out and here they get an instruction from the White House saying to stay away and have nothing to do with these people. If I'm not mistaken I think the instructions said that all contact should be confined to the channel that has already been established with the table tennis team, which meant me. I made an arrangement with Steenhoven that he would call me when he came back through Tokyo on his way back to the U.S. so that I would get a readout of what happened in China. Of course, the Chinese publicized everything that went on very heavily. They treated this group royally with hearts and flowers all over the place and cheers everywhere they went in China. The Chinese table tennis team arranged for them to win many of the matches. They were fed very well.



They arrived back in Tokyo on a Saturday evening. Steenhoven called me at home and told me he wanted to see me - - that he had an important message. They were leaving the following afternoon to return to the U.S. They were going to have to leave the Imperial Hotel around 11:00 in the morning to get out to the airport. I said to Steenhoven, "Let's have breakfast tomorrow morning. I will come by the hotel in a taxicab. I will not come in to find you in the lobby. You wait for me on the street corner. We will then come back to my house and have breakfast here and you can tell me what happened. Then I will take you back to the hotel and you can then go on your way." So, that is what we did. I pulled up to the hotel and Steenhoven was there and jumped into the cab and off we went to my house. I didn't want to use an embassy car, again not wanting to give any hint or public evidence of U.S. official interest in this event. When he got in the cab the first thing he said was, "They want to come to the United States and have accepted our invitation to come to the United States. Not only that, they gave me a message to take to the president." I said, "Okay." When we got back to my house, we had breakfast and Steenhoven gave me the full readout on the visit. I got him back to the Imperial Hotel and then went to the embassy and wrote up the report of my conversation with him.

He asked me if I could arrange for them to have the courtesy of the port upon arrival in Los Angeles because they were not bringing anything back of any value but everybody is terribly tired and worn out by this whole experience, emotionally and physically, and if we don't have to go through the long customs routine to get back into the United States it would be a relief. So, I included that in the telegram. Whether they received the courtesy of the port, I don't know. I think they probably did.

They left Tokyo and John Richardson, who was assistant secretary of state for cultural and educational affairs, flew out to Los Angeles and welcomed them at the airport. There was the evidence of the Department of State, the U.S. government, at an official level welcoming this gesture on the part of the Chinese. I think that was finally appropriate at that point. There had been many other statements out of the Department of State and the White House in the course of the week or two that they were in the PRC.



My experience with this whole thing was not over yet because then I had an endless stream of diplomats from the diplomatic corps coming around to interview me about how was our policy towards China changing. What I was telling them was what I had said all along. This is just an athletic exchange. There is no political significance to it. The United States has said it is open to these things in the President's and Secretary of State's reports. I was interviewed exhaustively by the foreign diplomats and the ministry of foreign affairs. I left Japan on June 21, 1971 on transfer to the U.S. I was fully truthful with everyone with whom I talked about this table tennis exchange and what I said it was and meant. Yes, it did indicate a warming of the relationship between the U.S. and the Peoples Republic of China. The Chinese were indicating that they wanted a closer relationship. It was a significant development, but it was simply a people-to-people exchange not something organized by the U.S. government in any way. It was spontaneous. We particularly assured my colleagues in the ministry of foreign affairs that this was the case. So, I went home.

In the middle of July on home leave I was sitting in my mother's kitchen in California, and the evening news came on. It was announced that the President would have an important statement to make. The President came on and said that he wanted to let us know that Henry Kissinger was just back from a secret visit to China and he has done this, that and the other. I thought, oh my God, everybody I told in Tokyo that this was an ordinary people-to-people exchange will not believe me at all. That was one of several of what the Japanese call "Nixon shocks".

Q: And you were lucky you weren't in Tokyo.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, but I felt sorry for my colleagues who were left behind holding the bag that I had set up for them. However, that's life.

I am planning to write all of this up because a lot is being written on the whole ping pong exchange, mostly by Chinese. I will say here on the record, again you asked about Chou En-lai and how he was regarded. The standard interpretation in "Henry Kissinger's White House Years," and in John Holdridge's "Crossing the Divide," which is the account of the rapprochement between the U.S. and the Peoples Republic of China, is that Chou En-lai was responsible for this exchange. That he is the one who had promoted it, engineered it, and worked it all out. This is not true. This is not to say that Chou didn't have a hand in it, but I have from three separate, independent sources, two of them PRC sources, that it was Mao Zedong who promoted this- (end of tape)



-exchange. One of my sources who at the time was the Deputy Director of the U.S. desk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told me that in a meeting he attended, Chou En-lai promoted all the arguments against doing this. I think that this shows something about Chou En-lai. I think he was a guy who knew how to play it safe and that he was not a risk taker and that he was not a policy initiator on the part of the PRC. He read the mind of Mao Zedong, to whom he was very close for many years. He read it accurately all the time and he survived because he was so good at reading Mao Zedong's mind and he was very careful to protect himself against any repercussions that might come out of decisions that Mao made or indeed against having gotten out in front of Mao's thinking and taken some initiatives on his own in advance of what Mao intended to do or different from what Mao intended. So, I believe as more study is done that the role of Chou En-lai will be shown to be somewhat over rated in respect to U.S.-China relations.

There is also something else here that I have got to run down and I am going to see Rufford Harrison about it in a few weeks. Harrison is of the opinion that the whole thing was a put up job. He recounts an exchange with the Chinese about the invitation that I never heard about at all. In other words he says that he was the first one to be sounded out by the Chinese with regard to the invitation, and it was not Graham Steenhoven or somebody else who received the invitation from the Chinese. There is a story to the effect that one of the U.S. table tennis players was the one to receive the invitation, or that it was floated to one of them, something of that kind. But, according to Harrison he was the one who was first approached by the Chinese.

Q: Who was Harrison?

CUNNINGHAM: Harrison was an official of the U.S. Table Tennis Association who at that time was the U.S. delegate to the International Table Tennis Federation. Steenhoven was the president of the U.S. Table Tennis Association.



The odd thing about this is that John Ehrlichman's book, "The China Card," according to Harrison, recites verbatim both the circumstances and the content of the exchange between Harrison and the Chinese side with regard to extending the invitation. Harrison says that this account is accurate. But, I never knew about it and I don't know how it came to the knowledge of Ehrlichman, through what channel. What I also don't know about is that Harrison said that upon receiving this overture from the PRC that he called the American embassy during business hours and talked to someone who said that it was no big deal to go ahead. There was no registered surprise at all at the invitation. I have no knowledge of who he talked to. I was not the one to whom he talked. So, I am going to see him the week after next and interview him in great detail about all of this and try to figure this out. I am not really ready to say that it was prearranged as is alleged in Ehrlichman's book, "The China Card," because I don't quite see how that could come about and to say it was prearranged does not square with some other things that I have heard about this exchange. But, I also don't know how to account for what happened to the telephone call from Harrison. I was the China watcher in the embassy. That was widely known by the spring of 1971. I had been there three years. Anything regarding China should have come to me if it went to anybody in the embassy. The embassy was a very professional place and we didn't have slip ups of that kind.

Q: Such is oral history not only on tape but also people's memories.

CUNNINGHAM: Anyway I am going to go into this and see if I can ascertain what actually happened. There are some odd things. I go back to the point that the ambassador made to me when I walked into his office. He didn't ask me why I was there. I assumed it was Alan Carter he was talking with but I don't know that. When I walked in he had some understanding of why I was there and before I said anything to him he told me to go ahead. If he was taken as unawares by Alan Carter's call as I was when I got the call from Frank Donovan, to me it would have been somewhat out of character for Armin Meyer to respond as he did. Eventually I will talk with Armin Meyer also about this because I'm curious about some of these things. Maybe there is really not anything there and maybe Harrison's assumptions will hold no water at all, but I want to find out a little bit more about this. In any case I want to write up as accurate an account of my experience as I can. So, that is more or less all there is to the Tokyo story.

Q: Okay. Where did you go when you came back?



CUNNINGHAM: Let's just recount quickly what happened to me in the balance of my career. From Tokyo I came back to the senior seminar on foreign policy. I had received notification in the spring of 1971 that I was nominated for it and asked whether I would accept the nomination. I was inclined to decline the nomination because I wanted another overseas assignment. I wanted to move up to a political counselor job some place. I thought I was ready for it. Bill Sherman told me in no unmistakable terms that I should accept the invitation because, he said, that it is an honor. So, I went into the senior seminar on foreign policy. It was enlarged by five officers that year because it had always been 25 and our class was 30. I was one of the first class-3 officers in the old system to be appointed to senior seminar. After that I was deputy director of the senior seminar for one year. Sam Berger was the director.

From there I went to CU (Bureau of Cultural Affairs) and was on the East Asia desk for a year. That was my out of area tour under Kissinger's global outlook policy. At the end of one year there the director of that office was transferred and I was expecting to move up from deputy director to director. I was moved up but not to head of that office. David Hitchcock was brought in instead. He is a fine man, I respect him, and well qualified for the job. I was instead put in charge of the Office of Youth, Non-sponsored Student and American Specialists program in CU, which I did for three years. During that time I negotiated the incorporation of the East-West center in Honolulu as a public, non-profit corporation.

From CU, in 1977, I was sent to New York to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations where I was assigned to the resource management section. That is the section that deals with UN budgets and personnel issues and represents the U.S. in the 5th committee of the UN general assembly. A counselor headed the section and I was his assistant. David Stottlemeyer was the counselor of mission for resource management and I was his number two. David Stottlemeyer was not well received by the new administration in 1977 and the new leadership.

Q: The Carter administration.

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, and Andrew Young was the new UN representative. Someway or other David Stottlemeyer was not looked on favorably by them or they wanted to move him aside in order to bring in one of their favorite people. Soon after I arrived Stottlemeyer was sent to Washington, so I filled two jobs, the deputy job and the number one job for a year. At the end of that year I was hoping again to move up to the chief position but that was not to be because the Young team had someone they wanted to serve in that position and he was brought in July 1978.



By then I had almost thirty years in the Foreign Service. I had over three years of creditable (for retirement) service in the Navy. There was a pay cap in effect and salaries were frozen. I had tried when we opened up the Liaison Office in Beijing to get posted there and was told that everyone else who was a China specialist hoped to get posted there and there were five or ten officers applying for every job. In the senior grades they had 20 for every job. I was not one of those selected to go. I can't quarrel with that because the people they chose to go were very good people, some of whom I had helped train when I was running the Chinese language school, so I respected the choices. The Department of State had initiated the outplacement program. We had an over abundance of senior officers. My family situation was changing so I decided that maybe it was time to think about retirement and I went into the outplacement program in 1979, after one year as acting director and one year as deputy director of resource management. It became very complicated for me and I did not have any really significant policy experience for the rest of my time at the U.S. mission to the UN. In fact, for most of that time I was on detached duty working in the outplacement program from New York where the company that was running it for the Department was headquartered. Rather than be brought back to Washington to go through the process I thought it would be more practical for me to look from there.

The short of the story is that in 1981, I received an offer or indication from the University of St. Thomas in Houston that they might be interested to receive an application from me for the directorship of their newly established center for international studies. I did that and was brought down for an interview that August, was asked for references in September, and in October I was offered a contract which I signed at the end of the month. I retired in January 1982 and went to Houston and immediately went to work as director of international studies.

Q: Looking at the time and the fact that you are up from Houston, why don't we concentrate on one aspect if you don't mind. That is about resource management at the UN. Management of the UN is a big problem. What were you doing and how did you view it?

CUNNINGHAM: Good. The 5th committee is the best seminar on the United Nations going because every unit of the UN has to come down and present a budget request and justify that request. I was in position to learn what every single part of the UN secretariat does and to get to know the heads of each of those organizations.



The problem with the UN secretariat is that the United States in the early years of the United Nations wanting to cultivate the goodwill of member states, particularly those which were and are from developing countries, presented a proposal to the United Nations every time a general assembly took place usually through one of the other committees (social and economic committee, human rights committee, etc.) for a new United Nations program. The thesis that we had at that time was if we could get the United Nations to take on a program for a country or groups of countries that would be in our view good for them, desired by them and in the best interests of the United States for them to have, that we would only have to pay 25 percent of the cost of the program. It was a way of extending foreign assistance without having to pay 100 percent of the cost. It was also a way of generating support for the United Nations in the international community, engaging them with the United Nations. That was all fine so long as we were able to exercise the preponderant political influence in the United Nations, over these countries and enlist their support for our foreign policy positions as the UN became involved in them or as they came before the UN.

So, we built up bureaucracies within the UN secretariat as a result of the initiatives that we took with regard to the United Nations. What we also built up were vested interests because once these bureaucracies got established they had two constituencies. The first constituency was the countries that would be beneficiaries of the programs that these bureaucracies operated and instituted with our encouragement. The second constituency would be the people who were selected in one way or another to operate these bureaucracies, many of them coming from other countries and supported by their country's permanent representatives and delegations to the United Nations. This bureaucracy grew in this way, under our patronage and with our encouragement to facilitate and advance the interests of the United States in the United Nations and through the United Nations.

By the 1970s, two things happened. We created an expectation on the part of developing member states that this process would go on a regular basis. Second, when Kurt Waldheim became secretary general of the United Nations he very quickly realized that he had a wonderful patronage instrument at his disposal and he encouraged the generation of new programs by the United Nations bureaucracy itself and the preservation of the ones that had already been established. The process in the 1970s began to go out of control and began to get expensive. As a result of the Vietnam War, we were running larger and larger budget deficits and having inflation in this country and Jimmy Carter came in and said, "Now we are going to do zero budget balancing." This was the situation in which I came into the business of resource management in the United Nations. Our instructions were to do everything we possibly could to hold down spending by the UN general assembly and to encourage the discontinuation of programs that were obsolete, ineffective, or had been completed.



I think by this time the UN had become from a management standpoint, an uncontrollable bureaucracy. Any time you tried to shut something down each of the constituencies that I mentioned would immediately go to Kurt Waldheim and say that this could not happen and he would protect the continuation of these programs because it was supporting his position as secretary general in the United Nations to encourage them to remain in existence and continue to function. Also, I think we were not candid about our own role. We blamed other people as spendthrifts and wastrels for wanting to continue these wasteful programs and to enlarge them rather acknowledging at least to ourselves that we had been responsible for creating them in the first place. I think we would have gotten further when it came to eliminating or reducing some of them had we acknowledged that, although we still would have faced resistance. I found that our style in dealing with other countries in the 5th committee of the general assembly was shortsighted and rather self centered. I tried while I was there to show some receptivity at least to the concerns of other delegations and some consideration for their self-esteem and I think I was successful to some extent, but not very successful so far as controlling the United Nations bureaucracy or budget. We left ourselves open. We presented a lot of pressure points to the UN bureaucracy that wanted to continue these programs in existence and to other delegations that had a vested interest in them. We were not very good at coordinating the defense or our position to resist those pressure points or counteract them in the UN.

So we started voting against the UN regular budget. First, we abstained in committee and then, later, in plenary, then voting against first in committee and later in plenary as well. I was responsible for drafting the explanation of vote in each of these instances. There was a difference between what we did in the years when the regular budget was up and in the years when the supplemental budget was up. That was all very carefully orchestrated. We more readily voted against the supplemental budget than against the regular budget at first. If we voted no in committee, we would abstain in plenary. But the graduated approach did little to slow growth in the budget or gain us supporters from other delegations.



We also began refusing to pay that percentage of our assessment which was equivalent to the cost of programs with which we disagreed as a percentage of the United Nations budget. The Russians were doing somewhat the same kind of thing. I think we weakened our moral position by doing that and weakened our moral position to discourage such behavior on the part of others. We used this tactic as a tactic to threaten and to try to get our way, not very successfully because we were overruled every time by the majorities against us. By adopting that technique we set a precedent for the congress to do the same thing and as a consequence the purview over the United Nations has passed out of the hands of the executive branch of the government into the hands of the legislative branch of the government. It is going to be very hard to recapture that now. We have set up the situation for mutual antagonisms between the United Nations and the United States, very much to our disadvantage, I believe. I don't know what the right way is to go about this, but I just don't think that we thought it through. We thought only in tactical terms on each issue, each vote, each general assembly session at the United Nations. We did not think in terms of long run objectives or goals. Part of the problem, of course, is the politicization of the United States delegation to the United Nations and the U.S. mission to the United Nations and also of the bureau of international organizations affairs in the Department of State. A larger and larger percentage of the staff members of the U.S. mission to the United Nations are political appointees and not professional officers.

Late in 1981 - - or perhaps it was during the first two weeks of January 1982, the end of my career, it fell to me to draft the explanation of the vote after the U.S. for the first time voted against the regular budget of the United Nations. I believe this negative vote was cast both in Fifth Committee and in the General Assembly. We had for most of the time that I was at the U.S. Mission been moving slowly toward this point. It was historically an important moment, though not an inspiring one. It marked, in my mind, one more step in retreat from the high ideals we had for the United Nations when it was founded. It seemed that no one else in the Mission had the background of personal involvement with the progression of our position to that negative vote to draft the statement. So I wrote it in a few hours one morning, and I may even have been present in the Fifth Committee room when it was given. It was a downbeat note, and not the sort by which one wishes to remember the last act of one's career. I don't think it benefitted our position in the United Nations, especially against the background of antagonism and tension that the Kirkpatrick coterie had by then generated in New York.

Q: Now, going back to the time you were there, it was, you might say, more professional but they were still making these short term tactical plans?



CUNNINGHAM: I was at the U.S. mission to the United Nations as early as in the mid sixties. It was a very professional organization at that time. Adlai Stevenson was the permanent representative; there were professional officers there as DCM and the heads of most of the sections. Or, they were filled by people who had a long track record of a professional nature in foreign affairs. In 1977 when Andrew Young came in the situation was quite changed. He had a professional officer, James F. Leonard, as his deputy and Don McHenry was there as the alternative permanent representative for the UN security council, and Melissa Wells for economic and social affairs. But, beneath them and on Andrew Young's personal staff there were a great many political appointees, schedule C appointees, well down into the operating levels of the UN mission to the United Nations.

The situation improved a little bit when Young left and Don McHenry became the permanent representative. In fact, within six months, Don McHenry, who is a very professional man, a superb manager, and a man for whom I have a very high regard, had that mission running very smoothly indeed in a very professional manner.

But, when the 1980 election went to the Republicans McHenry, of course, had to leave, and Jean Kirkpatrick was brought in as the permanent representative. Kirkpatrick's first meeting with the Mission staff early in 1981 set the negative tone for her tenure in New York. William van den Heuvel, then the DCM, called a meeting of the entire mission staff to introduce her. He gave her a very gracious and complementary introduction, and everyone was in a positive mood, looking forward to Ambassador Kirkpatrick's first remarks. Her turn came, and she said that this was not her first encounter with the Department or the Foreign Service. She said that upon graduation from university many years before she had taken a job in INR. Then she leaned forward, and with a bit of a glare in her eye, said "And I DIDN'T like it!" Instantly, a chill fell over the room, and just about everyone present felt rejected by the new Permanent Representative.

Under Kirkpatrick's administration, I was only there for about six months, the mission became even more politicized then it had been under Andrew Young. She appointed her proteges down to such levels as subsection director. So there were political appointees who were working below the level of counselor of mission in the United Nations where political appointees had never worked before. And, they had a direct channel of communications straight to Ambassador Kirkpatrick's office bypassing their own chiefs. It was the sort of system the Soviets had used, interspersing political commissars among professional managers and officers in the bureaucracy and the military services. The jobs of those people was not to help the professional staff carry out its mission; it was to report any words or actions that did not conform to the ideology of the Reaganauts, as the adherents of the new Administration called themselves.



This was representative, I think, of two things about Jean Kirkpatrick. First of all, she had never in her professional life ever had the responsibility of administering anybody more than a secretary or graduate school assistant. She was not an organization person at all. Secondly, unlike Andrew Young, who was an open and gregarious individual, she was rather closed, not especially approachable, suspicious of everyone around her and I think consumed with the idea that somebody was going to try to do her in or do something that was disloyal to her or undermine her position. Indeed, as I viewed her operation there it seemed to me that she was somewhat a pathetic figure on the one hand unequipped by experience to handle anything as complicated as the U.S. mission to the UN and on the other hand temperamentally predisposed to suspect anyone except a small, close circle of proteges whom she had shaped over the years and had dominated and whose loyalty to her was unquestioning, but who had no loyalty to the professional operations of our mission to the United Nations.

At the end of my active duty Foreign Service career I had one last encounter with China. After the PRC took China's seat in the United Nations Security Council several peace-keeping resolutions were presented for Council action. Usually the Security Council approved these resolutions by consensus. The U.S. and the Soviets had given up making peace-keeping an issue between them in the Security Council. Toward the end of the 1970's the Security Council adopted the practice of having informal, closed door consultations on major issues, such as, for example, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1977-78.

Each time a peace-keeping resolution came before the Council, the PRC Permanent Representative would abstain. Early in the 1970s, the Chinese also would explain their abstentions. As time went on, they continued to abstain, but stopped making statements in explanation. In the Fifth Committee, where I had been assigned, the PRC delegate would speak against the requests of the Secretariat for funds to finance peacekeeping missions, and he would consistently vote against them also. Then, late in 1981 the PRC, without explanation or comment of any kind, stopped opposing requests in Fifth Committee for peacekeeping funds, stopped voting against them and stopped abstaining in the Security Council.

The matter had gone almost completely unnoticed in New York, except among a few careful observers, and I suppose it was thanks to one of them that this change came to my attention.

It was not my responsibility to report on Security Council matters, but I was very curious about it and intrigued, so I did a little study of it. Then, and I do not recall how, I learned that the change was a calculated decision and that Pakistan had somehow been involved in it.



During the time that I served in the Fifth Committee India and Pakistan were represented by professional diplomatic officers, both of whom had been trained in Chinese, as I had. This became a bond among the three of us, and got to know one another very well. Both of my colleagues were very capable officers. So when I learned that Pakistan had something to do with this change of Chinese behavior on peacekeeping issues, I went to my Pakistani colleague, whose name I do not now recall. It turned out that he had been personally involved in bringing about the change. He told me the whole story, and I prepared full report to the Department on the matter. I also complimented him on his initiative and his accomplishment, which was indeed a genuine and important contribution to the strengthening of the United Nations. My Pakistani colleague told me that what finally brought the PRC around was the argument that China's opposition was depleting its political capital among developing nations, who generally favored and supported the peacekeeping role of the United Nations because it reduced the risk of superpower conflict.

The press did not notice this change until some weeks or a few months later. Some weeks or a few months later I noticed a New York Times report on the change in PRC behavior. By then I was in Houston and well into my new career. It gave me some satisfaction to know that in just about the final act of my Foreign Service career I had scooped the New York press corps and, apparently, most other missions and delegations to the United Nations.

Q: I think we might close at this point. Thank you very much.

CUNNINGHAM: You are welcome.

End of interview